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PREFACE

The study of Islam in China is fraught with linguistic challenges. I hope the reader will forgive the absence of foreign scripts in the text; they are omitted for the sake of brevity. Those who wish to see excerpts from original foreign-script texts and terms in the original languages should consult my doctoral dissertation.[1] In their place are roman transliterations to approximate their pronunciation. Although this work contains words from a number of languages, the majority of foreign terms are in Chinese or Arabic, and so I offer the following notes on transliteration.

The transliteration of Chinese follows the pinyin system, which is the official standard in the People's Republic of China and of most contemporary publications. However, like the Library of Congress and the American Library Association guidelines for the romanization of Chinese, I do not include tone marks, as they are quite cumbersome to both typist and reader. I deviate from the ALA-LC guidelines by linking syllables together to reflect the original polysyllabic Chinese compounds (e.g., *qingzhen*).

As for the romanization of Arabic words, I follow the 1997 edition of the *ALA-LC Romanization Tables: Transliteration Schemes for Non-Roman Scripts.* For the few instances of non-Arabic words from other Islamic languages that use the Arabic script (e.g., Persian), I also follow the ALA-LC guidelines for Arabic. For place names and proper nouns that have familiar English spellings (e.g., Mecca), I do use these rather than the ALA-LC transliteration (i.e., Makka). The alphabetic and diacritical correspondences are as follows:

CONSONANTS

ء	(hamza)	ض	ḍ
ا	(n/a)	ط	ṭ
ب	b	ظ	ẓ
ت	t	ع	(ʿayn)
ث	th	غ	gh
ج	j	ف	f
ح	ḥ	ق	q
خ	kh	ك	k
د	d	ل	l
ذ	dh	م	m
ر	r	ن	n
ز	z	ه	h[2]
س	s	و	w
ش	sh	ي	y
ص	ṣ		

VOWELS

(Short Vowels)		(Long Vowels)	
ـَ	a	اَ	ā
ـُ	u	وُ	ū
ـِ	i	ي	ī

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In an essay on the trials of scholarship, written toward the end of his career after years of reclusive study, Liu Zhi clearly expressed his natural human desire for companionship and understanding from family and friends, which he often had to sacrifice to his work:

> Particularly difficult was the fact that I had no comrades or colleagues. Even kith and kin considered that I could not make a living, which is unfortunate. But I did not rest from pursuing my ambition, and with firm determination continued to expound Islamic learning in order to disseminate it among the people. Thus, I proceeded on my own to work on the manuscript and to edit it, but even so I did not dare to feel overly confident in myself.[1]

This passage stands in place of words I could have written to describe my own experiences during the process of writing this book. Scholarship can be extremely solitary. Yet I consider myself fortunate to have had so many people enrich my life as I did my work, and by extension enhance it.

First, I must acknowledge Peter Awn. As my teacher he has opened for me entirely new perspectives on the study of Islam and many other topics. As my advocate he defended my work to others, and as my mentor he instilled in me the belief that my work was important, inspiring me with the confidence to persevere.

I also thank the other members of my dissertation committee, my first scholarly audience: Rachel McDermott, Neguin Yavari, Chun-fang Yu, and Madeleine

Zelin. Without their gracious support and generosity with their time, this project would have been impossible.

I am indebted to all of my Chinese-language teachers over the years, but I must make mention of three of my professors at Columbia, Roger Yeu, Paul Rouzer, and Ghopal Sukhu, who introduced me to the world of classical Chinese literature, thus making my research possible.

Special recognition and profound gratitude is due to Wu Pei-yi, whose encyclopedic knowledge of classical Chinese took me beyond the level of merely reading texts to a deeper understanding of their rich context and layers of complexity. Prof. Wu has acted as much more than an instructor, however; he has been a counselor, providing inestimable insight not only into specific literary works but also into the larger scholarly enterprise, including concrete advice about how to tackle this project as a whole.

With great respect I also remember the late Jeanette Wakin, whose instruction in Arabic was essential in helping me to open the "second front" in this great campaign by making classical Islamic texts accessible to me.

Jonathan Lipman, one of the living experts on Islam in China, was always there to offer a friendly ear as I worked out conceptual strategies, and he then proved invaluable in the transformation of dissertation into book, providing detailed recommendations for revisions and unconditional moral support.

Wang Jianping showed me the most genuine collegial respect and hospitality during my stay in Beijing a decade ago as well as helped me with sources, both acquiring them and understanding them. There are so many others who have taught me along this journey, and it would be impossible to honor each of them adequately for their various contributions, large and small.

I send my "*salām*" to Hei Honglu, a family friend who presented me with my first copy of the *Tianfang dianli.* Like the lay constituencies who enabled the Han Kitāb scholars to pursue their work, he has been a stalwart source of support in our shared aspiration to make Islam, and especially the story of Muslims in China, better known to the world.

There are not words to express the debt of gratitude I owe to my beloved family and dear friends. Edith and Joel Frankel gave me the moral, material, and emotional support without which I could never even have dreamed of accomplishing this work. Risa Frankel Swersey has been an indispensable booster over the years. Brandon Swersey is perhaps still too young to understand how much the light he has brought into my life has helped sustain me. Dr. Richard Feldman, a trusted confidant to my family since I was a small child, was there at crucial junctures to offer his sage advice and to act as a calming force. I thank Robin Morgan for moments of writers' empathy, not to mention her inexhaustible warmth and care.

The completion of this work marks the end of a protracted journey. Along the way, life has gone on, and so I must also acknowledge all those who have made their impact on my life during the past decade. If I have omitted their names, may they forgive me and know that I am grateful for all the lessons and succor I have received while traveling this path.

Finally, I must acknowledge the process itself, which has taught much about endurance and humility. The latter compels me to acknowledge my own smallness before the mammoth enterprise of pursuing knowledge and promoting truth and to accept full responsibility for any and all errors I have made in this effort.

INTRODUCTION

A simple confluence of facts—that China may soon be challenging the United States in its demand for foreign oil, that world oil production will peak and begin to decline within decades, and that China acts as a major supplier of arms and military technology to oil-rich, predominantly Muslim, Middle Eastern states whose region becomes less stable as oil supplies wane—all but guarantees the importance of Chinese-Islamic relations in the foreseeable future. Given this situation, the informed observer of international affairs would be well served not only by an examination of current relations between China and global Islam, but also of historical encounters between the Chinese and Islamic civilizations, which provide valuable insight into the roots of many of today's political and societal realities. In view of the long history of trade, not only in commodities, but also in ideas, along the geographical continuum that connects western and eastern Asia, recent relations between the Chinese and Islamic spheres of influence are grounded in an ancient tradition of economic, political, and cultural commerce. It is in this latter idea of transcultural transaction that the present study finds its particular context.

The *Tianfang dianli,* an examination of which is central to this work, is the product of the life experiences of its author, Liu Zhi (ca. 1660–ca. 1730), a Chinese Muslim scholar and resident of Nanjing in the early years of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). Liu Zhi's background placed him at the apex of the evolution of a Chinese Muslim scholarly network, which produced a unique literary corpus known by the appropriately hybrid Chinese-Islamic name the Han Kitāb.[1] The texts constituting this corpus represent a number of different genres covering a

wide range of subjects, but what links them, generally speaking, is their devotion to Islamic themes and their mode of expression through the classical Chinese idiom of Neo-Confucian literati discourse. As products of China's Muslim intellectual elite, the Han Kitāb is a tangible representation of the meeting of two civilizations.

The dialectical encounter between cultures typically produces a variety of syntheses, of which, in this case, the Han Kitāb corpus is one. The Confucianized presentation of Islam found in this literature may thus be regarded as a case study in the history of cross-cultural exchange, translation, syncretism, and accommodation of a minority community to the majority culture and society amidst which it lives. The blossoming of the scholarship from which the Han Kitāb emerged represents a milestone in the history of ideas. The present study straddles the narrow divide of cultural and intellectual history, examining an instance of syncretism of Chinese and Islamic thought in the writings of a Chinese Muslim scholar who, in many ways, epitomized the ideals of both sides of his dual heritage, embodying the phenomenon of simultaneity. Liu Zhi lived simultaneously in two cultures, each of which contributed to a unique hybrid identity.

These concepts of translation, accommodation, syncretism, assimilation, and simultaneity overlap and subtly interplay in recognizable patterns that have been and are repeated, albeit with some local variation, at different times and in different places throughout global history. In the encounter between civilizations, naturally, translation is invariably both an essential first step to interaction as well as its greatest obstacle. In this dynamic and organic process, as peoples become acquainted, accommodation represents an extension of basic translation and the necessary compromise that allows communication to proceed. Howard Giles' theory of communication accommodation aptly describes how interactants change their mode of communication to conform to different communication situations. It is readily observable that individuals accommodate or change the way they speak in a given situation in order to make themselves intelligible to their audience. Interactants "converge," adapting not only their speech patterns but their behavior and demeanor as well. Psychology and power dynamics play a significant role in this process, as the wish to be liked by others with greater position encourages people to act more like them and thus accommodate to their communication styles when interacting with them.[2]

When this process extends beyond individual communication to that between groups or communities, we witness the phenomenon of cultural accommodation, a common result of the interaction between minorities and the mainstream majority in whose midst they reside. When this process of adaptation lasts long enough or the pressures to conform are sufficiently great—particularly when sojourners become residents, as in the case of China's early Muslim immigrants—

those speech patterns and behaviors that were once borrowed often become natural, assimilated, as it were. When assimilation penetrates the surface of material culture into group consciousness, it produces communities that straddle, or blur, civilizational boundaries and participate simultaneously in two or more cultures, often creating a new, hybrid culture of their own. This simultaneity is not merely a strategy or survival technique, but a genuine ontological shift, not only in identity and social positioning, but in consciousness and cognition as well. It produces individuals who can comfortably navigate the apparent incongruities of different cultures and "think" in multiple categories and idioms. Syncretism in the realm of ideas is then the obvious, logical product of the evolution of a genuine simultaneity of identity and consciousness. Such is the case of Chinese Muslims generally, and of Liu Zhi more specifically, whose heritage of accommodation and assimilation produced a simultaneity that resulted in the sophisticated syncretic thought found in the Han Kitāb literature.

The phenomenon of cultural and intellectual simultaneity that lies at the heart of this work runs throughout the multifaceted scholarship on Islam in China and Chinese Muslims. The present study unavoidably grazes the topic of the cultural and intellectual evolution of an ethno-religious community, though it is more specifically concerned with the history of certain religio-philosophical ideas developed by Liu Zhi. Insofar as my work attempts to place the scholar in his historical and social context, it cannot help but refer to issues associated more generally with the study of minority cultures in China, namely, how a minority negotiates its identity in relation to the surrounding majority.

Studies of this aspect of Islam in China have juxtaposed two polar reactions by minorities to the majority society and culture: differentiation on the one hand, and assimilation, a trend that threatens the survival of the minority culture as a distinct entity, on the other. These are universal themes that recur, albeit with some variation, wherever and whenever minority communities have lived long enough amidst a dominant majority to have to choose between clinging to their "otherness" or losing their distinct identity in order to merge into the mainstream, or some middle alternative between these extremes. The history of Muslims in China presents itself as a fruitful case study of these familiar patterns precisely because the phenomenon was widespread and long-lived enough to offer a range of responses to the imperative to conform to Chinese social and cultural norms.

Within this context, it should come as little surprise that in the history of Islam in China, we find patterns of development that mirror and are mirrored by those associated with other ethno-religious communities throughout Chinese history. Notably, we find striking parallels with the history of Jewish and Christian communities in China. As examined in detail in the final chapter of this book, the evolution of accommodative strategies, theological notions, and modes of

literary expression among the three Abrahamic traditions in China indicates, at least, parallel development under the influence of similar cultural, political, and social pressures. These similarities may very well also suggest direct interaction and mutual influence across the boundaries of these various faith communities.

Given the historical conditions encountered by Muslims under imperial Chinese rule over more than a millennium, it makes perfect sense that their experiences also parallel those of other minority ethno-religious communities in far-flung regions and epochs of world history. Similar vicissitudes of persecution and tolerance have characterized these histories, ranging from pogroms, to policies of compelled assimilation, to the rise to positions of wealth and influence by outstanding members of each community under the aegis of local powers and principalities. A significant question faced by all minority communities in their navigation of the mainstream is that of identity, that is, who they are as defined by their relation to the majority. The challenge of living as a minority produces a range of alternative identities, some imposed by the dominant majority and others by members of the minority upon themselves, as it were, in the majority's shadow or reflection. Thus, Muslims in China, despite centuries of residence in the country and intermarriage with Han Chinese, have been and continue to be regarded as an ethno-religious minority community of foreign ancestry rather than a segment of the mainstream majority who happen to follow a particular religious tradition. Questions of Chinese Muslim identity are therefore reminiscent of similar questions confronted by other ethno-religious minorities in China and elsewhere, for example, the question of whether Judaism ought to be defined as a religion or an ethnicity. Muslims in contemporary China face a similar quandary, whereas, as we shall see, some of their ancestors—under different historical, ideological, and social pressures—had to address the more philosophical question of whether Islam was a foreign religion or a particular manifestation of the universal Dao.

Like other ethno-religious minorities worldwide and throughout history, Muslims in China have also been cited as an example of a diaspora community. Patterns of migration, dispersal, settlement, and assimilation of Muslims in China do indeed show characteristics of diasporicity. For instance, Muslims whose ancestors arrived and settled in China were effectively cut off from frequent or extensive contact with their brethren in the Islamic heartlands and were left to fend for themselves without the support of any Islamic state. In this way, the Muslims in imperial China may actually have shared more common experiences with the Jewish diaspora, whether in the East or in the West, than they did with other Muslim minorities living in different contexts where they had a more proximal relationship to a nexus of Islamic culture and/or political power.[3]

Chinese Muslim diasporicity has produced cultural manifestations, particularly in the area of literature, that are also responsive to common minority

experiences. Understandably, once they had built up, through centuries of assimilation, a critical mass of literacy in the local scholarly idiom, Chinese Muslims began to produce the literature known collectively as Han Kitāb. At first, the loss of Arabic and Persian as quotidian spoken languages necessitated the translation of religious texts from the Islamic languages into classical Chinese. After this initial phase, in subsequent generations the composition of original Han Kitāb texts included works such as the *Huihui yuanlai* (The Origin of Islam), attributed to Liu Zhi's father, Liu Sanjie (ca. 1630–1710), which traces the mytho-historical origins of Islam, focusing on its arrival and early development in China.[4]

Texts dealing with Chinese Muslim origins attempt to make sense of a minority community's struggle to exist in a foreign context amidst a frequently hostile majority population that does not share the minority's cultural and religious beliefs and practices. These texts, and the Han Kitāb in general, were written in the local language of scholarly discourse and thus reflected the purpose of reaching a dual audience: highly literate readers from within the author's own community who were assimilated into the dominant culture, as well as readers from outside that community. As such, books containing origin narratives, the *Tianfang dianli* among them, were simultaneously intended to persuade lapsed members of the Chinese Muslim community of the validity, and even superiority, of their ancestral tradition, while also justifying the tradition, in the face of prejudice and persecution, to outsiders. These works thus reflect the dual and interrelated needs of stemming the tide of assimilation in order to prevent the loss of a distinct ethno-religious identity, as well as defending the faith from attack by critics both within and outside the community.

Liu Zhi continued a long-standing tradition of translating Islamic religious texts into classical Chinese, but he also produced works that reflected original thought and innovative methodology. His writings include a great many Neo-Confucian terms and concepts in a systematic presentation of Islamic metaphysics, ritual, and history. This syncretism is epitomized in Liu Zhi's so-called "*Tianfang* trilogy" consisting of his last three major works: *Tianfang xingli, Tianfang dianli,* and *Tianfang zhisheng shilu.* These texts not only employ Neo-Confucian language and ideas, but, perhaps more than any of the other Han Kitāb, they also reflect an acceptance of the essential ethical and metaphysical harmony of Islam and Confucianism and thus represent the heights of Muslim intellectual accommodation to the Chinese cultural paradigm.

In the process of expressing his ethnic, cultural, philosophical, and religious simultaneity, Liu Zhi implicitly accepted the rationality of the dominant Confucian ideology of his day, while also addressing the gamut of major religio-philosophical traditions in late Ming–early Qing period China. Accommodating his thought to the rational standard of contemporary Chinese thought, in his

presentation of Islam Liu Zhi downplayed the role of revelation, expounding instead theological concepts with frequent reference to natural law and sophisticated metaphysical arguments of Neo-Confucian *lixue* (lit. "study of principle"). In terms of Islamic orthopraxy, he harmonized Muslim religious practice with the Confucian principle of ritual (*li*), thus demonstrating that Islam is built upon the same central pillar of civilization as Confucian culture is. Liu Zhi's treatment of Islamic ritual law is unique in that he is the only Han Kitāb author to have devoted a book exclusively to the subject. But the *Tianfang dianli* is more than a manual of praxis; it also seeks to justify Islamic religious practices ethically, philosophically, metaphysically, and even cosmologically. Thus, Liu Zhi lays out in its first four chapters arguments for the existence of Allah in a linguistic idiom and cultural context devoid of a historical monotheistic tradition. He attempts to show his Muslim readers that they could believe in and follow Islam without betraying their Chinese, Confucian heritage. He may not have successfully persuaded non-Muslim readers of Islam's exclusive truth, but the way Liu Zhi integrated Islamic and Confucian tenets certainly served the greater cause of defending his religion and co-religionists from official criticism. Furthermore, it ingratiated him with influential members of the Confucian literati elite, who, according to prefaces written by some of them for his texts, seem to have accepted him as one of their own.

In the chapters that follow, we explore Liu Zhi's background, his intellectual development, and his specific body of work and its legacy. Chapter 1 traces the methodology of this study and attempts to place Liu Zhi in his historical context. Chapter 2 provides his background in the historical development of the Chinese Muslim intellectual tradition. It further examines his sources and influences, as well as his legacy, including the recognition (after Liu Zhi's death) of the *Tianfang dianli* in the *Siku quanshu,* the official compendium of state-accepted literature under the Qianlong emperor (r. 1736–1796). In chapter 3, we delve into the contents of Liu Zhi's work, focusing on the author's use of specific Chinese terms and concepts, their origins and meanings in Chinese thought, and their correspondence to Islamic principles.

As we focus even more narrowly in chapter 4 on arguably Liu Zhi's most famous and influential work, the *Tianfang dianli,* we look more closely at his specific usage of the concept of ritual as a common foundation of both Confucian morality and social order and of Islamic piety. We next examine how Liu Zhi attempted to provide a theoretical substratum for his exposition of Muslim orthopraxy by expressing Islamic orthodoxy in Chinese philosophical terms. Chapter 5 thus contains a detailed analysis of the first four chapters of the *Tianfang dianli* before briefly dealing with the sinicized elements of Islamic praxis in the remaining chapters of Liu Zhi's book. Finally, after having witnessed the subtlety and finesse of Liu Zhi's syncretism and harmonization of essential Chinese and

Islamic religio-philosopical ideas, in chapter 6 we deal with the single greatest challenge facing him and his fellow Han Kitāb scholars: the translation of Islam's uncompromising monotheism into Chinese. In chapter 5 we will have encountered theological terminology and sophisticated metaphysical arguments. In the final chapter, we will trace the origin of these, including the neologisms coined by Liu Zhi and his colleagues to name Allah in Chinese. In this study, we see that one of the difficulties experienced by Chinese Muslim scholars is to simultaneously maintain fidelity to their Islamic faith while avoiding Confucian charges of heterodoxy. We see how the Han Kitāb scholars, and Liu Zhi in particular, were influenced by the literature of earlier apologetic translators of Abrahamic monotheism in China and how they retraced some of their steps while avoiding some of their more obvious missteps, all in the context of the ongoing, syncretic dialectic of Chinese civilization.

The heirs of Liu Zhi and the other Han Kitāb innovators found a way to navigate the vicissitudes of their own cultural diaspora by constructing a truly simultaneous identity, at ease with both sides of its dual heritage. The conceptualization of works such as the *Tianfang dianli* represents a vision of Islam that is unlike any found elsewhere, aptly described by Jonathan Lipman in his play on a Chinese Socialist slogan: "Islam with Chinese characteristics."[5] The Islam presented by Liu Zhi is remarkably Chinese not only in its superficial expression, but even in its core values, and yet it remains unmistakably Islamic. Perhaps this is attributable in large part to the fact that Liu Zhi and his Han Kitāb colleagues were so successful at embracing both the outward trappings and essential ethos of the literati class, whose status was paramount in traditional Chinese society, not unlike the role of the classic *ʿulamāʾ* in Islamic society. Because Chinese Islam developed scholarly institutions and a literary tradition, it was able to fuel a social-intellectual-cultural movement among the more sinicized Muslims of eastern and central China. This movement, in turn, was capable of producing outstanding individuals who could promote their accommodative vision of Islam with ever-increasing sophistication, systematization, and eloquence. Liu Zhi, commonly regarded as an epitomic figure in this history, contributed significantly to the refinement, legitimization, and popularization of this aspect of a simultaneously Chinese-Islamic culture, residing rather comfortably in the space where two civilizations meet.

CHAPTER 1

THE WORLD OF LIU ZHI

The multifaceted nature of Islam in China invites us to view it with an adjustable lens, sometimes focusing widely over a span of centuries and across vast geography, sometimes requiring a narrower scope to view particular circumstances of time and place. Our overview of the writings of Liu Zhi requires a similar flexible perspective. A wide focus allows us to place Liu Zhi in the grand scheme of the historical development of Islamic and especially Chinese society and culture. A narrow perspective reveals that neither "China" nor "Islam" is the seamless monolith it appears to be from a distance.

At a global level of magnification we see Islam in China straddling two worlds, and it is here that we encounter Chinese Muslims acting as mediators between these two worlds along sometimes literal, sometimes metaphorical frontiers. Even greater magnification and a narrower focus show "Islam in China" to be no more monolithic a phenomenon than either of the two great civilizations that constitute its name. China's Muslims are separated from each other, as members of distinct solidarities or as individuals, by geography, living as they do throughout the vast country. They are and have been also divided along ethnic, linguistic, economic, educational, sectarian, and kinship lines, among many others. Some Chinese Muslims, because of greater geographical proximity and stronger lines of communication and transportation to the heartlands of Islam, feel a deeper connection to Muslims living outside China than to co-religionists elsewhere in China. As a result, Muslims residing in western parts of China have often drawn their religious and cultural inspiration more directly from the Islamic world. Others have come to live lives more remote from their Islamic brethren

outside China and have seen their existence and their future as being intimately and inextricably linked to the fortunes of the Chinese state and society. Observation of these differences among various Muslim communities within the borders of China, in both late imperial and modern times, uncovers deep fissures and wide gaps, which have at times put some Muslims at odds and in open conflict with other Muslims in China.

It is at the next level, beyond the fissures, that a more nuanced picture comes into focus, wherein one can see the complexity of responses that various Chinese Muslim groups and individuals have made to the pressures they confronted. Some of these strategies aimed to promote the prosperity, or ensure the survival, of Chinese Muslim communities; some Chinese Muslims regarded these strategies as crucial even to the very perpetuation of Islam in China. The present study is concerned with one of these strategies: the work of a special class of Chinese Muslim scholars, active during the late Ming–early Qing period (circa sixteenth to eighteenth centuries), who created the Han Kitāb canon. This body of literature collectively was to become a viable expression of Chinese Islamic ideology and identity, widely acknowledged as authoritative by many of China's more sinicized Muslims. And yet even as the Han Kitāb and the literati network that produced it represent a largely unified movement within the otherwise fractured reality of Chinese Islam, internal nuances within the network and its literature also exist.

As Zvi Ben-Dor has demonstrated in his groundbreaking work on the Chinese Muslim intelligentsia, *The Dao of Muhammad: A Cultural History of Muslims in Late Imperial China,* several generations of geographically dispersed scholars were linked together by professional, intellectual, social, and kinship bonds, which in many ways paralleled those of non-Muslim Chinese literati networks. The bonds that linked these scholars transcended time and place, and the commonalities among the producers of the Han Kitāb galvanized their network. Despite their connectedness, however, these scholars were individuals, with diverse stories. They lived in a variety of centers scattered throughout central and eastern China, often relocating peripatetically, and their work spanned generations. Although many were related by blood or marriage, the individual Chinese Muslim literati each had his own specific family background; some came from multigenerational scholarly lineages while others were first-generation scholars from mercantile or military families. Such individual differences in background and personal predilections account for variety in the works they produced.

Here our focus narrows yet again, homing in on the specific background of a particular individual in order to isolate factors and underlying conditions that could have influenced, directly or indirectly, the trajectory of his life, thought, and work. The approach of focusing on particularities is one shared by Jonathan Lipman in *Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China.* Although

his work focuses on a different facet of Chinese Muslim history, Lipman has occasion to discuss the Han Kitāb literature, and he acknowledges the importance of distinguishing among various texts grouped together under this rubric on the basis of "their authors' surroundings, religious convictions, and intellectual preferences."[1] In dealing with the writers of the Han Kitāb in general and Liu Zhi in particular, I find myself guided by similar concerns, leading to a similar methodology that seeks to avoid the conceptual pitfalls of "hegemonic narrative" and the "errors of universalism and overgeneralization that plague the dominant paradigms," especially in the study of Chinese history.[2]

An examination of Liu Zhi's background sheds light on some motivations for undertaking his work and reveals sources of conceptual formulations and intellectual choices in his writings. In the interest of identifying where Liu Zhi differed and/or accorded with other intellectuals from the Islamic, Chinese, and Chinese-Islamic traditions, pinpointing where and when he lived is a crucial first step to analyzing his work. Understanding his connections to the greater traditions to which he was heir, and of the burgeoning network of which he was a part, follows naturally.

In the historical narrative that unfolds, the method of progressively narrowing the foci on both space and time is recommended because the stories of Muslims in China "cannot be told only in the aggregate, in terms of ethnic groups or regions. Rather, we meet individual human beings, follow their decisions and indecisions, try to understand their position as participants in what appears to be two cultures."[3] This is the sort of understanding of Liu Zhi that we seek. The only modification to this methodology that I propose is the use of an adjustable lens, one that not only narrows the focus but can widen it as well. By retaining this flexibility of perspective we can easily shift focus between the particular subject within our narrow scope and the larger context into which it fits. In *From Philosophy to Philology: Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China,* Benjamin Elman refers to this dual perspective as the integration of the "internal history of ideas" and the "external history of social and political institutions."[4] Our perspective must also shift between the "big picture of the major changes" in "Chinese social and intellectual history" and the "microworld of increasingly complex and precise philological analysis."[5] The appeal of such a flexible perspective is that even as we zero in on factors that have influenced the life and work of Liu Zhi and analyze the specific content of his writings, we can also see the connection of these factors to other phenomena in the surrounding field.

Having outlined the narrative methodology, we may now construct a picture of arguably the most prolific, systematic, and famous of the Han Kitāb writers. This assessment is supported by the breadth and volume of Liu Zhi's work; his fame among Chinese Muslims, who still revere his writings and his memory; and

the unquestionable linguistic talent demonstrated by his ability to translate from both Arabic and Persian and to communicate in an elegant *wenyan,* classical Chinese writing style. Non-Muslim Confucian literati praised his literary elegance in prefaces to his books, and even one of his critics attested to his mastery of language in the form of a backhanded compliment: "His literary style is actually rather elegant. However, the premise is at its root untrue, so the clever literary ornamentation does him no good."[6] Indeed, Liu Zhi's remarkable achievements and personal history justify the claim that he "can be considered the quintessential Chinese Muslim scholar in that he existed at the center—chronological, dynastic and geographic—of the Chinese Muslim educational system."[7]

Most of the information we have concerning Liu Zhi's life and career comes from autobiographical statements scattered throughout forewords and introductions to his major works, as well as claims made by his colleagues and friends, both Muslim and non-Muslim, in laudatory prefaces to his books. The obvious tendency toward bias and hyperbole notwithstanding, such sources are not unusual in their cultural and intellectual contexts, and traditional Chinese historiography is replete with them. In the mid-seventeenth century members of the Chinese Muslim intellectual network, acting increasingly in the manner of a distinct Chinese school, took up the Chinese literati practice of writing self-reflective literature about themselves, "their scholarship, their institutions of learning, and their educational curriculum."[8] They also began to attach autobiographical statements to their larger books and treatises.

In 1677, Zhao Can (1607–ca. 1695) published a record of Chinese Muslim scholarly lineages, the *Jingxue xi zhuanpu* (Genealogy of Transmission of Lineage and Classical Learning). The historicity of its content must be taken with a grain of salt, as some of its accounts verge on hagiography. Its greater value lies in its mirroring, in style and genre, works of non-Muslim Chinese elites, such that its very existence reveals how the Chinese Muslim intelligentsia regarded itself as a class of scholars equal to their non-Muslim counterparts. Thus we approach the sources on Liu Zhi just as we must approach studies of other Chinese scholars and historical figures, whose primary sources are frequently texts similar in style to those available to researchers of the Han Kitāb scholars. Sinologists typically do not balk at the use of such sources in the context of non-Muslim Chinese historiography, and we need not do so here so long as we remain conscious of pious embellishments intended to idealize the character of the subject while praising his achievements. Keeping this in mind, we may presume that the basic outline of the individual's biography is reliable and find value even in exaggerated narratives, as these reflect the central interests and motivations of the community that produced them.

Beholden to these sources on Liu Zhi, we encounter not only their inherent biases but also their limitations. There are significant gaps in the story one is able

to construct from the biographical sources at our disposal. However, if one is willing to accept at face value the claims made in the available sources, one can actually arrive at a nearly complete view of Liu Zhi's most active years, the major gaps coming mostly at the beginning and end of his life.

LIU ZHI'S EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

Verifying the exact dates of Liu Zhi's birth and death is problematic. The consensus is that he was born around 1660; the exact year of his death is even more elusive, but it occurred sometime after 1724. What is clear is that his life overlaps roughly the entire reign of the Kangxi emperor (1662–1722), a period of consolidation for the newly established Qing dynasty (1644–1911). Liu Zhi was born in Shangyuan (present-day Nanjing), which by the early eighteenth century was already well established as a center for Chinese Muslim scholarship and a nexus of Chinese literati activity in general.

Liu Zhi was born into a scholarly family. His father, Liu Sanjie, was active in the Chinese Muslim educational network as a student and teacher at the Islamic school founded by Yuan Shengzhi (b. ca. 1620) in Nanjing. Liu Sanjie was not only affiliated with the Yuan family by scholarly lineage, but he was also related to them through ties of kinship and marriage. Liu Zhi tells us that his father was distressed by the dearth of Islamic literature in Chinese[9] and, in an attempt to remedy this situation, translated at least one book on Islamic ritual and law, the *Tianfang lifa* (Ritual Law of Islam). Liu Sanjie also composed another Han Kitāb book, the *Qingzhen jiaoshuo* (Explanation of Islam), and a third, the *Huihui yuanlai,* is attributed to him. He also wrote one of twenty-four "dedications" (*zengyan*) to Ma Zhu (b. 1640) for his *Qingzhen zhinan* (Guide to Islam), thus placing him among the "who's who" list of Chinese Muslim intellectuals of his generation.[10] Liu Sanjie "had never attained his desire to make his own contribution to the Chinese discussions of Islamic philosophy,"[11] but he did pass this desire on to Liu Zhi, who realized his father's lofty aspirations. And while Liu Zhi clearly surpassed his father in both talent and achievement, he spoke of the inspiration he received from Liu Sanjie in highly self-deprecatory terms of filial respect:

> My late father thought that ritual law was not understood clearly. As I am but his son and not clever, how shall I ever dare here to aspire to such ambition and say that I shall continue his undertaking? Therefore, I only transmit what I have learned.[12]

Such filiality and reverence for the learned tradition also evoke core Confucian values, as the final phrase of this passage echo Confucius' famous self-description:

"I have transmitted what was taught to me without making up anything of my own."[13]

What Liu Zhi learned, first from his father and then, starting around the age of twelve, from his principal teacher, Yuan Ruqi (b. ca. 1640), son of Yuan Shengzhi,[14] was the basic curriculum of the Jingtang (lit. "Scripture Hall") educational system as it had evolved up to his time. Liu Zhi's primary education presumably began at home with his father and continued under Yuan Ruqi at the mosque at the Wuxueyuan (Garden of Military Studies) in Nanjing. Little is written about the exact course of studies there, but it probably consisted of learning to read and recite the Qurʾān and preliminary instruction in Arabic and Persian. This curriculum was standard in the Jingtang educational system. Like other young Chinese Muslim students, Liu Zhi's education presumably began with an introduction to Qurʾānic Arabic, as well as training in the basic ritual obligations and daily practices incumbent on Sunni Muslims.

His early education must also have included learning how to read and write Chinese, for by the age of fifteen he was able to begin studying the Confucian canon on his own. In the earliest days of the Jingtang educational reforms, an introduction to Chinese classics and histories helped round out a curriculum that still lacked Islamic texts in Chinese. By Liu Zhi's time, however, a number of Islamic texts had already been translated from Arabic and Persian and a few original texts were composed in the preceding generations, so some portion of his preliminary training was most probably in these Chinese Islamic texts.

Under the strong influence of his father and teacher, Liu Zhi was groomed from childhood to continue the family tradition of Islamic scholarship. The factors of his background, of where and when he lived and of who his forebears were, all contributed to Liu Zhi's preparation, motivation, and resolve to embark on a scholarly career at the age of fifteen. If we take him at his word, Liu Zhi was precocious but not altogether unusual. Liu Zhi's account may be truthful, because only by starting his career so young could he possibly become the prolific scholar he did. At the same time, we must note that the age of fifteen would certainly have held special significance for Liu Zhi, as for any Confucian, evoking as it does Confucius' well-known saying in the *Lunyu:* "From fifteen, my heart-and-mind was set upon on learning."[15] When describing his own education and formative years, Liu Zhi used almost exactly the same phrase, an obvious homage to the tradition.[16]

It is quite fitting then that at this highly symbolic age Liu Zhi embarked on his study of the canon of Confucian classics, as well as Chinese dynastic histories. While he began these studies later than one normally would in order to become an official examination candidate, this certainly gave him a stronger foundation in classical Chinese than that to which most Chinese Muslims, not to mention the vast majority of ordinary non-Muslim Chinese, could ever aspire. Obviously impressed

by the depth and breadth of Chinese literature Liu Zhi had read, the non-Muslim Confucian official Jing Rizhen, imperial censor of the Shaanxi Circuit, commented on Liu Zhi's level of attainment in his preface to the *Tianfang dianli:*

> The gentleman Liu, who goes by the style name of Jielian, is mild-mannered and restrained, studious and fond of books. Drawing from a variety of scriptures and classics, histories, novels, romances, fiction, fictitious histories, law books, books of divinations, as well as the writings of the Two Schools [i.e., Buddhism and Daoism], there is nothing he did not peruse or research. Furthermore, he was also able to reconcile all of the above with the Six Classics. He researched into the totality of Neo-Confucian metaphysics,[17] and deeply fathomed the essential subtleties of the Confucian literati tradition.[18]

After eight years of immersion in the Confucian canon, Liu Zhi then returned for six years to the study of Islamic books in Arabic and Persian. Next, displaying an unusually cosmopolitan and ecumenical mind, he devoted three years to studying Buddhist texts and one year to Daoist writings. In a preface to his final major work, Liu Zhi wrote that during this latter stage of his studies he also read numerous "Occidental books" (*Xiyang shu*).[19] There has been some debate as to exactly what this nebulous description might have encompassed. Most scholars agree that it refers the literature of the Jesuits, who maintained a strong presence in Nanjing during the late Ming–early Qing period.[20]

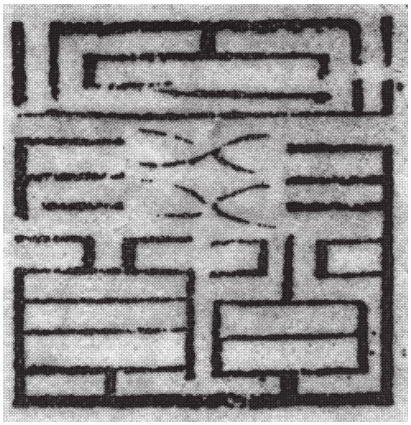
The Jesuit literature included European texts translated into Chinese[21] as well as original Christian apologia in Chinese, repositories of Confucian-Christian syncretism— written by Jesuit missionaries, beginning with Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), and their Chinese literati converts. We cannot be certain exactly which "Occidental books" Liu Zhi read, but he was far more knowledgeable about Islam and the Judeo-Christian tradition than the average Chinese scholar of his day, and he certainly knew more about the so-called "San Jiao," China's "Three Teachings" (Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism), than virtually any other Muslim at the time. His erudition clearly made a strong impression on the assimilated Chinese Muslim Yang Peilu, who showered praise on his colleague in another *Tianfang dianli* preface:

> He studied the Islamic classics in his youth, and tackled Confucian studies when he grew older. He subsequently amassed besides a broad knowledge of the Two Schools and European literature. Indeed, there is nothing that he has not grown familiar with, but through painstaking and exhaustive research.[22]

The overwhelming majority of Liu Zhi's Chinese literati contemporaries knew only one written language, Chinese. If some of them knew another, it would have been Manchu, Mongolian, or Tibetan, languages of important minority communities in the Qing empire. Among native users of Chinese, only those few who had converted to Roman Catholicism, who would have studied some Latin or other European languages, could even approach the Han Kitāb authors' capacity to read non-Qing texts. These men were unique in both the Muslim and Chinese intellectual worlds by virtue of participating simultaneously in both as insiders. Liu Zhi's linguistic abilities and his willingness to use an eclectic array of texts made him "one of the best educated, most versatile and widely read scholars—Muslim or otherwise—to work in China during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries."[23]

After the formative years of his childhood and adolescence under the mentorship of his father and Yuan Ruqi, and eighteen years of deep immersion in his independent studies, at thirty-three years of age Liu Zhi possessed a unique array of academic abilities and intellectual tools. He was thus fully prepared to embark on his career and assume the mantle of the leading figure in the Chinese Muslim scholarly network. Liu Zhi had probably already tried his hand at writing at this stage of his career. However, he was untested and had yet to find his voice as a scholar and author.

a. 金陵劉智字介廉號一齋西周
Jinling Liu Zhi zi Jielian hao Yizhai Xizhou
"Liu Zhi, known by the *zi* Jielian and the style name Yizhai Xizhou, of Jinling (Nanjing)"



b. 願學
Yuan Xue "Willing to Study"

FIGURE 1. Liu Zhi's Seals

He came from an important scholarly lineage and family in a cultural center, and as "the son of a teacher and the disciple of a major teacher (Yuan Ruqi), Liu's networks of filiation brought him into contact with all of the major teachers and scholarly figures of his time."[24] Likely among the prominent Chinese Muslim scholars he met in his youth was the most famous Han Kitāb author of the previous generation, Ma Zhu, who was famous for his writings but even better known for his travels, which brought him to virtually every major Muslim center in China. Along the way Ma Zhu met all the important figures in the Chinese Muslim scholarly network. Consequently, despite his origins in remote Yunnan province, Ma Zhu became a linchpin in the further growth of the network on the eve of its greatest period of development.

It is impossible to say exactly what impact Liu Zhi's putative encounter with Ma Zhu may have had on the young Islamic student.[25] Even after his educational preparation, as he began writing, Liu Zhi still lacked the worldly experiences that would integrate him fully into the scholarly network. Therefore, he began to travel through eastern China in search of new texts and teachers. In so doing, Liu Zhi, like Ma Zhu before him, put into practice the advice given to She Yunshan (b. ca. 1635) by one of his teachers: "If one does not travel for [the sake of] studying, [one] will not be able to reach completeness."[26] Travel in pursuit of knowledge is a time-honored tradition in Islam, as in other religious traditions, as attested to by the oft-repeated Ḥadīth: "Seek knowledge, even though it be in China for, verily, the pursuit of knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim."

Neither Liu Zhi nor his father, teacher, or other associates is known to have traveled abroad. Liu Zhi did, however, travel fairly extensively between the large cities of eastern China, in a manner common among non-Muslim Chinese literati. This would have been no mean feat at a time when the political consolidation of the Qing dynasty was still underway and rebellions persisted south of the Yangzi River during the late seventeenth century. Perhaps this is why Lipman insists that Liu Zhi "remained all of his life in the narrow corridor between the lower Yangzi valley and Beijing."[27] However, other scholars speculate that his travels extended to China's heavily Muslim northwest, including Shaanxi and perhaps even Gansu.[28] Jin Yijiu enumerates the destinations of Liu Zhi's first major journey, based on biographical sources from the period containing traditional place names:

> Even after completing a portion of his manuscripts, Liu Zhi did not dare presume or feel confident about his work, so he packed provisions, shouldered his bundle and took to the road. He traveled through Qi and Lu [present-day Shandong] to the gates of the capital [Beijing]. There he paid a formal visit to a notable gentleman from whom he asked advice. From Chu [present-day Hubei and Hunan] he entered

> Western Qin [present-day Shaanxi] where he sought a place to stay and study long-neglected religious texts. He passed through the Wu Gate[29] and roamed Wulin,[30] going beyond Guiji.[31] He finally arrived in Yuedong,[32] where he made inquiries and read the books in the Hu family's Tianlu Pavilion library, finding there what he never could before.[33]

Liu Zhi's travels played an instrumental role in his evolution from student to scholar. In addition to facilitating his research, travel allowed him, perhaps more importantly, to discover renewed motivation at various stages of his career. For example, later in life he continued to acquire knowledge and sources away from home, including a rare copy of a Persian biography of the Prophet Muḥammad[34] that would become the basis of this last major work, the *Tianfang zhisheng shilu* (True Record of the Ultimate Sage of Islam).[35] On the last leg of the same journey in 1720, Liu Zhi was inspired to write about the Islamic "sage" (Muḥammad) on a pilgrimage to the home and tomb of the Chinese sage, Confucius, in Qufu.

In addition to his acquisition of material sources, in his travels Liu Zhi made valuable contacts with fellow scholars and potential patrons among the Chinese Muslim scholarly network and its larger constituency. Among the latter group was Hei Mingfeng, a Muslim military official from Shandong Province,[36] who wrote prefaces to all of Liu Zhi's early works and a commentary to the *Tianfang xingli.*[37] If Liu Zhi had not traveled in Shandong, he might not have developed this important relationship with the man who was to become his primary source of support early in his scholarly career. In this way, Liu Zhi's travels may be seen as the transition between his studies and the period of his scholarly productivity upon returning to Nanjing.

NANJING, THE JIANGNAN REGION, AND THEIR MUSLIM POPULATION

Chinese culture has traditionally put tremendous importance on the idea of the individual's ties to his or her ancestral home and/or native place.[38] The sense of longing for, and belonging to, the place of one's ancestral origins is a recurring theme in Chinese literature, commonly associated in classical poetry and prose with the displacement of leaving home. Centuries of warfare, political turmoil, famine, drought, and natural disaster have meant that millions of people in China have been uprooted and transplanted in search of peace, security, and livelihood. Traditional Chinese culture has therefore also recognized the possibility of developing attachments to a new home, even as one pines for the land of one's ancestors. The environment of one's new home also has the power to reshape the

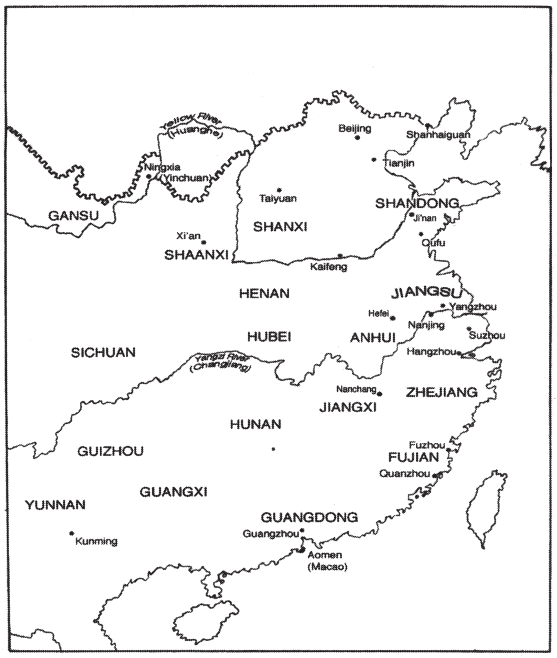


FIGURE 2. Map of Eastern–Central China with Provinces and Key Cities

individual, as one becomes naturalized there. Thus, even as there exists a belief in the linkage between one's blood and ancestral land, there is also the idea that one is influenced by conditions in a new locality. The traditional Chinese adage "as the water and soil of a place, so too are its people" encompasses this dual interpretation, for like a native born to a place, the newcomer, after being transplanted in and nourished by its soil and water, may eventually become one of its people.

In the case of Chinese Muslims, this interplay between ancestral and naturalized ties has been especially complicated. Their origins, in terms of ancestry, are remote and diverse, both temporally and geographically. Furthermore, their placement within China has likewise been widespread and staggered over history, with some groups arriving earlier than others and settling in different places. Muslims often have been perceived as "foreigners" by their non-Muslim neighbors, even after centuries of life in China have proved their residence there to be anything but temporary. In their own assimilation to Chinese ways they have paradoxically maintained a very "Chinese" longing for their ancestral home (often remembered mythically as Mecca or Arabia, even when their ancestors may have come from elsewhere in the Muslim world), as well as a local attachment to their respective

native places within China. In this context, Lipman's coinage of the term "familiar strangers" to describe the status of Muslims in China is quite apt.

Despite Liu Zhi's reference to Tianfang as the "center of the world" and the ancestral home of all humankind,[39] in his many biographical statements he never made explicit mention of his family's specific ancestral origins outside of China. In this regard, he is unlike Wang Daiyu (ca. 1570–1658), another Nanjing native, who boasted that his ancestors were from "Arabia"[40] before arriving in China in the Yuan period (1279–1368),[41] or the Yunnanese Ma Zhu, who claimed direct descent from the Prophet Muḥammad. Liu Zhi saw the most distant roots of all life, and the universal truth of Islam, in remote Arabia, yet he saw his own proximal roots as firmly planted in Chinese soil. Mentioning his hometown in his writings with apparent pride, he most often referred to Nanjing by its ancient name, Jinling, thereby showing reverence to the local tradition and the Chinese half of his dual heritage.

The early Muslim arrivals of the Tang dynasty (618–906) were spread through various parts of China, mostly taking root in urban enclaves. Later, under the Mongol policy of importing administrators from their other domains, including Islamic regions, to serve in the Yuan dynasty bureaucracy, a new wave of Muslims appeared in China. In the subsequent period, "[b]ased on the wide distribution of Muslims in China under the Yuan, the evolution of the Sinophone Muslims during the succeeding Ming dynasty took place in a bewildering variety of contexts."[42] The distinctiveness of these diverse contexts calls for "careful research, which must be *local* rather than generalized."[43] One of these many contexts in which Chinese Muslims found themselves was Nanjing and the greater Jiangnan region in which it is located.[44] Liu Zhi's native home is where our story begins, the history of the city providing an essential background to the understanding of his work.

Long before Liu Zhi was born, Nanjing had been an important city in China's history. Its geographical position provided a temperate climate and fertile conditions for agriculture and silk cultivation, leading to a large population and economic prosperity. The city thus became strategically important and was made the royal capital of numerous states before the founder of the Ming dynasty, Zhu Yuanzhang (1328–1398), made it his imperial capital in 1377. It was as the capital of the new Ming empire that Nanjing served as the political, economic, and cultural center of China. The surrounding Jiangnan region had long been a hub for intellectual activity, serving as the principal region for book production and printing in China and as a haven for diverse religious institutions and philosophical traditions. Therefore, even when the Yongle emperor (r. 1403–1424) officially moved the capital to Beijing, reducing Nanjing's political importance, Nanjing retained its status as magnet for literati of various intellectual bents.

When Matteo Ricci sought to expand the Jesuit mission beyond southern China, he resided for a time in Nanjing, hoping to attract many of the city's cultural elite to Catholicism. In the process, he became a prominent feature in the local social scene, while at the same time his efforts introduced Western, Christian ideas to the already rich religio-philosophical milieu. In time, Nanjing's sizeable, centuries-old Muslim community also added their views to the city's cosmopolitan intellectual discourse. Living in the most literate and literary region of China, most local Muslims were by the Ming period highly acculturated, many of them having been trained in the Confucian educational system. Within this population were teachers and students of Islam, as well as wealthy patrons, who played a significant role in the evolution of the Chinese Muslim scholarly network. The Jiangnan region would eventually become the source of "virtually all of the figures involved in the production of Chinese Islamic books,"[45] with Nanjing developing into the pre-eminent center of Chinese Islamic intellectual activity. It is for this reason that Liu Zhi's "location in Nanjing put him at the very centermost hub of scholarly activity in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries."[46]

A generation before Liu Zhi was born, however, the fortunes of Nanjing, and indeed the entire Chinese empire, were profoundly altered. In June of 1645, the Manchus captured Nanjing, ending centuries of Ming rule there and signaling the ascendancy of the new Qing dynasty in China's cultural capital. The Manchu invasion was a source of humiliation for the conquered populace, and the transition between the Ming and Qing dynasties created a period of grave uncertainty for them. This national crisis did not leave Nanjing unscathed, but the Jiangnan region generally, due to its economic and cultural vibrancy, was able to emerge from the cataclysm in better condition than most other parts of China.

The ability of the Jiangnan region to recover relatively quickly from the social, political, economic, and cultural upheaval of the Manchu invasion allowed Nanjing to maintain its status as one of the pre-eminent cities in the new Qing empire. Although the Manchus maintained their capital in Beijing, closer to their ancestral lands north of China, Nanjing and the region around it continued to be an important source of both financial and intellectual capital during the late seventeenth century and through the eighteenth century, as the Qing dynasty reached the height of its power. Not surprisingly, the fortunes of local Muslim scholars, which often paralleled those of the mainstream non-Muslim literati, also reached a high point during this period. The transregional, multigenerational Chinese Muslim scholarly network reached its apogee in the life and work of Liu Zhi, who followed a long line of notable Chinese Muslim scholars native to Nanjing that included such luminaries as Wu Zunqi (1612–1680), Wang Daiyu, Yuan Ruqi, and Liu Sanjie.

TRANSITION, CONSOLIDATION, AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION UNDER THE QING DYNASTY

Analyzing the influence of Chinese dynastic factors on the career of Liu Zhi requires us to examine some of the predominant features of the early Qing period. Originating as an alien conquest regime, the Manchu dynasty was keenly aware that it faced major challenges in gaining legitimacy in the eyes of the peoples it had conquered, both Han Chinese and other ethnic groups. Thus, while seeking simultaneous approval from different constituencies, the conquerors also had to resolve fundamental conflicts among groups and institutions, which arose as they established and consolidated their authority. Chinese society underwent a tremendous transition between the fall of the Ming dynasty and the Manchus' attempt to transform their conquest regime into a legitimate imperial dynasty. The new dynasty, particularly under the aegis of the Kangxi emperor, sought to establish hegemony over China and, despite its own foreign origins, to project an image of legitimacy over an ethnically and culturally diverse empire. Thus the early Qing rulers had to strike a delicate political balance between the interests of diverse groups under their rule. They did so by portraying themselves differently to different constituencies both within and beyond China's borders in the hope of promoting an image of universal legitimacy.

The greatest and most persistent hurdle for the dynasty was winning the acceptance of the Han Chinese, especially the elites who remained loyal to the previous dynasty. It was for this reason that the early Qing emperors were all trained in their youth by Confucian tutors and personally embraced aspects of literati culture. Epitomizing this attempt to court the scholar-official class, the Kangxi emperor portrayed himself as a champion of orthodoxy, restoring the Cheng-Zhu school of Neo-Confucianism,[47] established in the Song dynasty (960–1279), to the status of state ideology, as it had been during the Ming period. The Qing rulers also used propaganda to downplay animosity between the Han Chinese and their Manchu overlords, attempting to portray relations between the two groups as harmonious.[48]

But the Qing rulers also recognized the value of support from various minority groups. To gain this support, the early Qing emperors cultivated images of themselves as leaders congenial to the concerns of different, often competing groups. The Qing court developed different policies for dealing with specific constituencies within the empire, in keeping with what has been described as the Manchu "cosmopolitan" and "ethnic" modes of expressing supremacy.[49] The "dual foundation" whereby the Qing rulers went about the difficult task of "maintaining the balance between" Chinese and non-Chinese "poles of legitimation" led to a bifurcated identity used by the dynasty to achieve the separate

goals of conquest and consolidation of legitimate power throughout the empire.[50] The Qing emperor has been described as a universal axis around which his empire revolved, a "figuration of centrality," and an "integrating center" that radiated power and authority to connect the empire's disparate constituencies.[51] As a universal ruler, the emperor would absorb within himself aspects of multiple cultures in order to express his sovereignty with equal legitimacy to various ethno-linguistic, political, religious, and ideological constituencies, in their own terms, as a set of "simultaneities" (e.g., Manchu and Chinese, civil and military, Confucian and Buddhist, among others).[52] These features of the Qing imperium would not reach their fullest expression until the reign of the Qianlong emperor (r. 1736–1796), when the empire expanded into Central Asia and Tibet, thereby encompassing vast territories that were home to even greater ethnic and cultural diversity. However, even in this earlier phase in Qing dynastic history, the Kangxi emperor, having cultivated his image as a Chinese monarch and champion of Confucian orthodoxy, also did not abjure appealing to various religious or philosophical traditions for legitimacy.

The fact that the Qing rulers themselves came from an alien ethnic minority that sought legitimacy within the categories of Chinese culture, while at the same time holding onto a distinct Manchu heritage, is particularly germane to the study of Liu Zhi and the Chinese Muslim literati. The Han Kitāb authors, in some ways emblematic of Chinese Muslims collectively, also negotiated two sides of a dual heritage. We may use the term "simultaneity" to refer to the Chinese Muslim scholars' identification with both Chinese and Islamic cultures, thus replacing the binary processes of conversion or a minority's accommodation to or assimilation of the dominant culture.[53] It is no coincidence that this notion of simultaneity applies to both the Qing imperial identity and the Chinese Muslim scholars so aptly. Rather, it is an indication of parallel processes whereby the dynasty's quest for legitimacy and consolidation is reflected in the concurrent negotiation of identity among ethnic and religious minority communities within the empire. Nor was it only minority communities that were affected by Qing-period questions of identity. Their world turned upside down by foreign conquest, the Chinese majority also had major questions of identity to deal with, seeking a way to make sense of how they had become the servants of putatively culturally inferior invaders. Thus the numerical ethnic majority, especially the first few generations under Qing rule, had occasion to re-examine, if not redefine, their identities as well.

The Qing political climate opened a window of opportunity for various communities, among them Chinese Muslims, to express their beliefs and collective identity as being not only unthreatening to Chinese culture and society, but, moreover, completely consonant with the values and doctrines of the dominant

Confucian ideology. The hybrid cultural, religious, and intellectual identity cultivated by the Han Kitāb scholars parallels in many ways the multivalent dynastic identity promoted by the Manchu rulers. The dynastic circumstances under which they were active gave Liu Zhi and the other Chinese Muslim literati a unique historical chance to express their dual Chinese and non-Chinese identity, in other words, their own Chinese Muslim simultaneity.

Early Qing dynasty ethnic policies served as both cause and effect of the Manchus' own efforts at identity construction. The image of universal sovereignty the dynasty promoted relied heavily on a mythology of Manchu origins to project legitimacy. Ben-Dor suggests that "Manchu myths of origin strongly *effected* their own identity, and *affected* a host of identities."[54] As such, the Qing court's process of identity construction by means of revisionist origin narratives is related to Chinese Muslims' efforts to reconstruct the history of their religious community in China, whereby they portrayed "themselves, and Islam, as harmonious with—and even vital to—the survival of Chinese tradition."[55] The scholars of the Han Kitāb engaged in this process during the early Qing period, at the precise moment when Manchu rulers were also seeking to explain their origins and identity. This parallelism is an example of how the regime's behavior facilitated and was reflected in the behavior of minority groups among its subjects.

The imprint of the dynasty was also apparent in the manner in which Han Kitāb authors incorporated references to the Kangxi emperor into their writings. Liu Zhi's life and times were most profoundly influenced by the dynastic circumstances of the Kangxi period. His childhood, formative years, and most of his career occurred under that sixty-year-long reign. Liu Zhi had no direct contact with the regime, and traces of any relationship to the throne in his writings are rare.[56] He did not seek to gain official recognition from the Kangxi emperor, as his Han Kitāb predecessor Ma Zhu had done in the previous generation, though he did follow Ma Zhu in attempting to present his texts to the imperial court.[57] However, the influence of the Kangxi zeitgeist on the trajectory of Liu Zhi's life is undeniable. The fact that he lived nearly his entire life under the propitious shadow of the Kangxi imperium played an important role in shaping his ideas, as evinced by an implicit appeal for legitimacy that runs through his writings.

CHINESE AND MUSLIM INTELLECTUAL TRENDS

As the culminating figure in the evolution of the Chinese Muslim educational system and scholarly network, Liu Zhi was the product of and heir to multiple strands of intellectual history emerging from both the Chinese and Islamic traditions. Because of the hybrid nature of Chinese Muslim culture, we must search

broadly for the roots of Liu Zhi's thought and writing, not only in specifically Chinese Muslim circles, but also more generally in the intellectual trends of China and the Islamic world. Nevertheless, our emphasis must be on China, for this is where our story takes place, where Liu Zhi and the other Han Kitāb writers lived and worked. In the context of Chinese intellectual history a wide range of factors influenced the Chinese Muslim scholars in concert with their engagement in the mainstream Confucian culture. To wit, Tu Weiming lists some of the factors that affected Wang Daiyu and that would apply equally to Liu Zhi:

> [H]is family, his teachers, the Muslim community in Nanking, Islam in China, the spread of Catholicism in the Confucian intelligentsia, the popularity of Pure Land Buddhism and religious Taoism, the vibrancy of the folk traditions, and a host of non-religious factors all weighed in Wang's educational choice.[58]

To this list, we can certainly add the contributions of the Chinese Jews, whose community in Kaifeng had attracted the attention of Jesuit scholars since Matteo Ricci's initial contact with them. Chinese Jewish writings, especially the stelae inscriptions found at the Kaifeng synagogue, were a likely influence upon both Chinese Catholic and Chinese Muslim literature, as a precursor to the translation of monotheism into Chinese, as we shall see later. Yet above all, it was the deep imprint of native Chinese thought and scholasticism that made the work of Chinese Muslim authors more than merely translations of foreign ideas into Chinese; the Han Kitāb were simultaneously works of Islamic doctrine and Chinese literati tradition.

HAN KITĀB ROOTS IN CONFUCIAN SOIL

Liu Zhi, like many of the other Han Kitāb writers, began the study of the Confucian classics at a young age. Confucian doctrine was therefore deeply ingrained in their consciousnesses. Thus, while Islam was their faith and native religious tradition, Confucianism constituted a major part of their native culture. Chinese was their mother tongue, and they were educated in the Confucian curriculum. As is true of any culturally hybrid community, Chinese Muslims did not merely use the language of the mainstream society without the values and categories of that culture utterly penetrating their self-identity and worldview. While Muslim, they were also born participants in Chinese culture, bearers of two native traditions, which functioned simultaneously. The values inculcated by a Muslim upbringing and a Confucian education rendered the project of harmonizing the teachings of Confucius and his followers with the teachings of the Qurʾān and the Prophet

Muḥammad a natural choice for a scholar like Liu Zhi. It is also significant that Liu Zhi was active during a period of classical Confucian re-ascendancy, as the Kangxi emperor reinstated Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism as state orthodoxy. Nevertheless, the influence of the burgeoning *kaozheng* ("evidentiary studies") movement, which would become ascendant in the second half of the eighteenth century, may also be seen in his and other Chinese Muslim scholars' writings.[59] Thus, aspects of the evolving Confucian tradition were reflected in the Han Kitāb as the canon itself evolved from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, so much so that one cannot possibly understand this body of literature without acknowledging its debt to the Chinese religio-philosophical tradition in general and Confucianism in particular.

THE THREE TEACHINGS AND SYNCRETISM

The teachings of Confucianism were the unquestioned foundation of religio-philosophical orthodoxy in imperial China. Any other tradition wishing to make inroads in Chinese culture and society had to accommodate itself first to the dominant Confucian paradigm. Daoism and Buddhism constantly negotiated their place in Chinese culture, but were nevertheless considered irredeemably heterodox by the arbiters of Confucian orthodoxy. Even so, these two traditions exerted a profound influence on Chinese culture and society, such that the Confucian establishment had no alternative but to respond to them in its discourse and even accommodate its teachings to some of their popular concepts and practices.[60] The tendency of Chinese culture to assimilate diverse religio-philosophical systems of belief and practice may be seen as both a cause and an effect of a long tradition of synthesis and syncretism. This tendency strongly influenced the ability of members of foreign religious communities to find their respective niches within the syncretic framework that evolved in China over centuries.

The history of China's encounter with, and absorption of, foreign cultures and ideas, in addition to contributing to the unique synthetic construction that is Chinese civilization, is also part of the larger mimetic evolution of human civilization as a whole. In the grand scheme of history, language, both lexicon and syntax, has served as a crucial foundation of human thought. Consequently, obstacles presented by language differences among communities have posed a significant problem in the historical encounters between civilizations. Attempts to overcome these difficulties and reach mutual linguistic coherence have produced dynamic syntheses. With respect to the exchange of religious and philosophical concepts from one culture to another, any writer apologizing for a foreign tradition, wanting it to be perceived as civilized, has no choice but to use the language of the host, the dominant cultural idiom. Apologists and missionaries for foreign

traditions in China were thus compelled to employ a particular version of written Chinese to explain their traditions. While we shall briefly examine some of the precursors to the Han Kitāb writers' attempts at cultural translation, we shall later have occasion to examine in greater detail how the problem of translation, specifically of the central tenets of monotheism, posed some of the greatest challenges to Chinese Muslim writers, but also led to the dynamic synthetic religio-philosophical constructions of Liu Zhi.

In the history of China's historical encounters with foreign traditions, Buddhism first found its place alongside Confucianism and Daoism as one of the Three Teachings. Over time, other foreign religions such as Judaism, Manichaeism, Christianity (first Nestorian and later Catholic), and Islam underwent their own respective processes of coming to terms with the main traditions of China. In many ways, these processes mirrored or paralleled each other, especially as later religious communities followed the paths blazed by those that preceded them. They all had in common, however, a need to negotiate with one or more of the Three Teachings, either by way of accommodation to conventions of orthodoxy or by distancing themselves from ideas, individuals, and institutions deemed heterodox. Any discussion of the intellectual and ideological background of Islamic scholarship in China must acknowledge the historical interplay of the Three Teachings and the syncretic tendencies that surrounded them.

The great diversity of religious and philosophical traditions that had characterized Chinese culture since ancient times was augmented by an influx of foreign ideas under the Tang dynasty (618–906). Under the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368), when China was linked to the rest of Eurasia as part of the vast territory under Mongol rule, another infusion of foreign traditions occurred. Increased diversity, combined with the long tradition of religious tolerance and syncretism among the Mongols, helped fuel another episode of religio-philosophical synthesis in Yuan China. This in turn set the stage for the flowering of the widespread Three Teachings syncretism movement of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), a period paradoxically marked by intermittent xenophobic protectionist policies as well as an outward-looking cosmopolitanism that permitted the development of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic scholarship and literature in Chinese.

HARMONIZATION OF THE "FOURTH TEACHING"

Followers of a number of foreign religions entered and settled in China under different circumstances and with various motivations. Some of them made efforts to naturalize their respective traditions on Chinese soil, with varying degrees of success. A number of these religious traditions came originally from western and Central Asia, entering China with mercantile caravans, along the same trade

routes of the Silk Road that had first brought Buddhism. While there is evidence that this movement of ideas and commodities developed simultaneously with the silk trade as far back as the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), by far the greatest influx of these foreign religious and cultural influences occurred during the early Tang dynasty, an era renowned for its cosmopolitan attitudes. Most notably, among the religions brought by foreign merchants and emissaries were Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism from Iran and Central Asia, Judaism, Nestorian Christianity, and Islam.[61] In the thriving port of international maritime trade, Quanzhou, archaeological and historical evidence indicates the existence of places of worship for most of these religious communities, as well as Hindu and Jain temples.[62] Similar conditions existed in the Tang capitals of Chang'an[63] and Luoyang and a handful of other major commercial centers in the country where foreigners lived in urban enclaves. Of these many sects and religions represented in earlier times, only Islam survives with a significant community of believers in China today.

The majority of the early representatives of these foreign religions came to China not as professional missionaries, but as merchants and political emissaries hoping to secure favorable trade relations. Their religious beliefs and practices were simply elements of their cultural baggage, which they carried along with them incidentally as they traveled and traded. This is not to say that followers of these foreign religions did not share their beliefs if invited to do so by curious Chinese audiences, for such exchanges certainly did occur, and they account for the introduction of legends and mythological motifs from a variety of non-Chinese traditions into popular Chinese folklore.[64] However, the primary motivation of these Zoroastrians, Manichaeans, Nestorians, Jews, and Muslims was not to win converts among the Chinese, but rather to transact and coexist peacefully with them, to find new opportunities, or in some cases to escape religious persecution in other lands. In this way, they differed from the Buddhist monks who accompanied commercial caravans with the ambition of spreading their faith to foreign lands. Not until the later arrival of European Catholic missionaries would China again witness such intense proselytizing efforts. The history of Catholicism in China culminated in the arrival of the Jesuits, whose missionaries and Chinese converts were active participants in the religio-philosophical discourse of the late Ming–early Qing period. This of course placed them chronologically in a position to interact with, and quite possibly influence, Chinese Muslim scholars.

The ways in which different foreign religious communities in China dealt with the pressures to assimilate for the sake of survival, and yet hold onto their religious and cultural distinctness, contain certain identifiable patterns of common experience. Within these general patterns, no two groups had identical experiences, and the similarities between them may be mapped along an imaginary sliding scale measuring the degrees of assimilation and resistance to assimilation they

demonstrated. Factors influencing movement along this spectrum would have to include the historical circumstances of each religion's entry into China, whether it was transmitted "organically" by trade, or whether religious professionals on proselytizing missions played a role, and how large a role such clerics played. Another important consideration in graphing these historical trajectories would be how much contact the foreign religion's transplanted adherents and their descendants maintained with the religion's traditional homeland beyond the borders of China. Such contact helped bolster some communities longer than others, providing the vitalizing influx of new ideas over succeeding generations.

While Chinese culture has generally been considered fairly tolerant of foreign religio-philosophical influences, it has nevertheless also been chauvinistically protective of its indigenous traditions. Any faith or philosophy that would establish itself in China, whether as a community or a mission, would have to confront this reality and adapt, accommodate, and/or harmonize itself with native beliefs, practices, and institutions, particularly those of Confucianism. Buddhism, the foreign religion to naturalize most successfully in China, both accommodated itself to the Confucian context and syncretized itself with Daoist metaphysics. It was thus able to find its niche, ultimately standing alongside the two indigenous traditions as the third among the Three Teachings. Every other foreign religion that arrived in China subsequently would have to negotiate its own space in relation to each of these three traditions and later with the syncretic triune of the Sanjiao.

Some foreign religious communities posited their faith, tacitly or explicitly, as a "Fourth Teaching" or hoped to supplant all other contenders to the position of Confucianism's companion tradition.[65] Their proponents did so by arguing that their tradition was derived from the same ultimate source as the Confucian teachings, namely the "Way of the ancients." Proponents of the various foreign traditions thus frequently mirrored and influenced each other's methods even as they vied for position and survival in China. It is therefore no coincidence, for example, that during the late Ming and early Qing periods, the writings of Jesuit and Chinese Christian apologists resemble in so many ways the works of the Chinese Muslim Han Kitāb authors. All these players were engaged, often simultaneously, in the complex and multifaceted social, intellectual, and spiritual discourse of the times, and all were obsessed with coming to terms with Confucian China, defining themselves in terms of its literati traditions.

ISLAM IN CHINA

Islam arrived in China during the Tang dynasty, carried with the caravan trade along the overland Silk Road from the West, via maritime trade from the Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea, and Indian Ocean to southeastern Chinese coastal cities, and

on horseback by military mercenaries, who fought in skirmishes along China's western frontiers. Muslims also came to the Tang empire on diplomatic missions sent by various caliphs of both the Umayyad (661–650) and ʿAbbāsid (751–1238) dynasties. The foundations of the Muslim population of China were laid by some of these early arrivals, who settled in Chinese cities, intermarried with Chinese women, and established permanent Islamic enclaves in various parts of the country. But Islam, as the religion and culture of the early settlers, remained a distinctly foreign entity in China, kept apart from the mainstream of Han Chinese society by the differences of language, custom, and faith. Of course, the ideal of the Confucian meritocracy assured the possibility that some foreigners who were willing and able to acculturate could find a place, even elite status, in Tang society. Yet even if they could overcome cultural obstacles, the fact that most Muslim immigrants to China were engaged in commerce automatically placed them at the bottom of a Confucian social hierarchy that disdained merchants. This economic reality, perhaps more than Chinese xenophobia, excluded most Muslims from elite status in the aristocratic Tang society. Thus, even after generations of residence in China whereby the descendants of early Muslim sojourners rose to the status of *wushi fanke,* or fifth-generation foreigners, even their more naturalized presence in China was still perceived as foreign.

The arrival of foreign Muslims continued into the Song period, made up particularly of Muslim immigrants seeking economic opportunity or refuge from political turbulence in the Islamic world. The influx of Muslims from western and Central Asia during the Song dynasty included individuals from prominent Muslim families, who settled in China, amassed fortunes, and even rose to positions of power in government. Yet even with the inroads made by Tang *wushi fanke* communities and the Muslim families naturalized during the Song period, and the participation of Muslims in various areas of Chinese society, Islam in China had yet to be sinicized and thus remained an outsider phenomenon, stigmatized by a sense of foreignness.

The establishment of the Mongol Yuan dynasty (1279–1368) linked China with the vast Eurasian Mongol empire. This multinational and multiethnic empire encompassed all of Central Asia and parts of the Middle East and therefore contained a large Muslim population. The Mongol policy of bringing in soldiers and bureaucrats from their distant domains to preside over local conquered peoples meant that Muslims were imported to serve the Yuan government as civil and military administrators in China. Muslim administrators played an important role in the incorporation of frontier regions, such as the southwestern province of Yunnan, into the Yuan domains. Mongol policy placed Muslims in the Semu class of a social hierarchy divided along ethnic lines.[66] This status allowed certain prominent Muslims to rise to positions of considerable power and wealth under

Mongol rule. The political climate also drew large numbers of Muslims from the Mongols' western territories to China, where they sought economic opportunity, often settling among the Muslim communities that already existed there or pioneering the settlement of frontier territories. For the most part, Mongol policies of religious tolerance afforded Muslims in China a significant degree of autonomy in the administration of their own communities. Thus while the Muslim population of Yuan China grew, both in size and prosperity, it largely continued to function separately from Han Chinese society and retained its foreign stigma in the eyes of most Chinese subjects.

When the founder of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) overthrew the Mongols and restored native rule to China, one might have predicted a government backlash against Muslims, many of whom had actively participated in the Yuan regime. This never happened. The early Ming emperors were wary of Mongols living in China and exiled the majority of the former ruling elite to the other side of the Great Wall, but members of other ethnic groups who had served in the Yuan administration were retained. Thus Muslim military officers, architects, astronomers, and engineers, among others, played an important role in helping build the Ming empire. Imperial patronage notwithstanding, however, popular resentment of Muslims among the Han Chinese majority, which had existed since the Tang dynasty and only grew in bitterness as the result of Muslim collaboration with the Mongols, reached dangerous heights.

The Ming rulers, hoping to defuse the potential for ethnic strife, therefore enacted policies intended to accelerate the "civilization" of "barbarian" minorities, including laws to help accelerate the natural process of acculturation of various ethnic and cultural communities. The daily force and inevitability of acculturative processes had certainly shaped the history of the Muslim community in China even before the Ming period, but never before had a regime taken such concrete steps to oversee Muslim assimilation into mainstream Chinese culture and society. While the widespread adoption of Chinese language and material culture by Muslims living in eastern and central China would have occurred anyway, the Ming policies certainly catalyzed a more rapid naturalization that helped transform Islam in China into Chinese Islam.

Yet we must not oversimplify a complex history by reducing the evolution of Chinese Muslim social position and cultural identity to the product of external political forces. While Ming policies clearly played a significant role in, and likely accelerated, this process, they were not the only reason behind the social and cultural transformation of Muslims. Multiple and nuanced internal factors and pressures within the multifaceted Muslim community must also be acknowledged as a major impetus for this transformation. And, as we have seen, predictable patterns of assimilation, to which any minority community is subject, must be considered

as well. Indeed, the regime's policies may have been responsive to these factors as much as it helped to produce them. Furthermore, the social benefits this transformation brought about ought not be viewed merely as outcomes of the regime's policies. In fact, the order of cause and effect could even be reversed, such that the social benefits created by natural patterns of assimilation were also triggers of further transformation, and this transformation helped fuel Ming policy initiatives. This may help explain why "assimilatory" tendencies among Muslims continued even under the subsequent Qing dynasty, when a completely different type of empire, with quite a different political agenda, emerged.

Whatever the cause or effect of the social benefits enjoyed by Muslims in Ming China, we should bear in mind that benefiting its Muslim subjects was not a priority nor a direct objective of the dynasty. It was instead the result of a domestic policy based primarily on foreign policy concerns. The Ming regime's assimilation laws may be attributed to the dynasty's focus on the re-sinicization of China after a century of foreign rule under the Mongols. The Ming government sought to define and secure Chinese identity and patrimony via methods that, at least under the reign of several Ming emperors, verged on protectionism, if not outright xenophobia. That is not to say, however, that the three-hundred-year Ming dynasty was monolithic or consistent in its worldview. The dynasty's founder, Ming Taizu (r. 1368–1398), was erratic in his policies concerning "foreigners" in general, including Muslims; while tolerant, even solicitous at times, of Muslims in the realm, the emperor nevertheless also limited his empire's contacts abroad. By contrast, his son, the Yongle emperor (r. 1402–1424), was incredibly outward-looking in his perspective and actually reversed most of his father's policies toward Muslims. We must recall that he also commissioned the famous treasure fleet, under the command of the Muslim admiral Zheng He (1371–1433), to make seven voyages of exploration to expand Ming trade, prestige, and contact with the then-known world. Through much of the period, though, a more inward-looking foreign policy greatly reduced Chinese contact with the outside world, including Islamic Central Asia. One of the effects of such policy was to cut Muslims off from their own cultural hearth in the central lands of Islam, leaving them to negotiate their way amid a vast non-Muslim majority with little support or influence from outside China.

By the sixteenth century, many among the highly sinicized Muslim communities of central and eastern China pursued a classical Confucian education that could enable them to take the official examination, a means to social advancement. Chinese had become the mother tongue of assimilated Muslims, and a significant portion of this population was also literate in classical Chinese. By contrast, Arabic and Persian had dwindled in use among these Muslims, except for the liturgical Arabic used in daily rituals by those families who kept up their religious observances. For these purposes, rudimentary instruction in the Islamic

languages, for the purposes of fulfilling basic ritual obligations, was often given to Muslim children at informal schools in local community mosques. There were, however, some Muslims in central and eastern China who were concerned about the possible erosion, or even disappearance, of Islamic knowledge and identity that accompanied assimilation.

One such individual was Hu Dengzhou (1522–1597), who had been educated in his youth in the Confucian curriculum but who craved a deeper understanding of Islam than was available from the mosque school he attended as a child in Shaanxi. Realizing that such learning was impossible to find in China, and with the flow of ideas and people from the Islamic world curtailed by Ming foreign policy, Hu Dengzhou did what few others in his time dared. He traveled for years through Central Asia, and eventually to Mecca, seeking instruction and Islamic texts he could bring back with him to China. Upon returning to China, he undertook the reform of existing mosque-based education and instituted a new system, which combined traditional Islamic and local Chinese elements, rooted in Chinese soil, but fertilized by a fresh infusion of knowledge from the Muslim heartlands.

Known as Jingtang Jiaoyu (literally, "Scripture Hall Education"), Hu Dengzhou's innovations included the expansion of the curriculum to include newly introduced Arabic and Persian texts, which required more intensive language instruction than had previously been standard in Chinese Muslim schools. He also implemented the practice of training teachers who could then go out to communities in different locales to train others in the new curriculum and pedagogy. In so doing, Hu Dengzhou laid the foundations of the scholarly network that would blossom at the end of the Ming period. Perhaps the greatest innovation of the Jingtang Jiaoyu system devised by Hu Dengzhou was the introduction of Chinese texts into the Islamic classroom. In the early days of the educational system, Islamic texts were scarce, so Hu Dengzhou and his followers translated those they had into classical Chinese. Eventually, this practice led to the production of a sizeable Chinese Islamic curriculum and the gradual blending of Confucian and Islamic ideas that would gain its fullest expression in the Han Kitāb. As the educational system, curriculum, and burgeoning scholarly network grew in sophistication, the teachers and students took on the appearance of a true subclass of Chinese literati, which eventually gave rise to individuals who would write the Han Kitāb, the production of which began with literal translations of Islamic texts into Chinese. From these modest beginnings, the scope and breadth of the Han Kitāb evolved eventually to encompass commentaries and comprehensive treatises, including the original works of scholars like Wang Daiyu, Ma Zhu, and Liu Zhi.

CHAPTER 2

CHINESE MUSLIM TRADITION AND LIU ZHI'S LEGACY

With the formation and spread of the Jingtang Jiaoyu educational reforms came the demand for texts to fill out the new curriculum. Previously, the founder of the nascent educational system, Hu Dengzhou, had been driven by the scarcity of texts to venture away from his hometown, and eventually outside China, in search of Islamic knowledge. Specifically, he felt that Chinese Muslim communities lacked texts and methods for teaching Muslims like himself whose mother tongue was Chinese. The loss of ability among most Chinese Muslims to understand Arabic and Persian had effectively cut the majority off from the printed sources that were available, and it meant that even those who could read the Qurʾān did so with little comprehension of its meaning. The experiences of the pioneering Hu Dengzhou served as the template for the generations of Chinese Muslim teachers and students who followed, and from that template came the development of a curriculum, pedagogy, corpus of literature, and a scholarly identity.

Among the first steps in this progression was the translation by Hu Dengzhou and his immediate followers of Islamic texts brought to China. This translation phase in the development of Islamic education and scholarship in China was a response to the need for a curriculum for sinophone Muslims. The translation of Islamic literature into classical Chinese had the secondary effect of introducing Confucian language into Chinese Islamic discourse. With the introduction of the Confucian literary idiom came an infusion of Chinese religio-philosophical terms and the concepts they expressed. And thus, through the process of translation and explication using Chinese, sinicized Muslims began the process of merging

Confucian and Islamic thought, which later culminated in the original works of the Han Kitāb writers.

This evolution toward harmonization was not free from complexity and disjunction. As they reconciled the two sides of their dual heritage, Chinese Muslim scholars struggled to maintain a sense of honoring tradition even as they embarked on an enterprise that required significant innovation. Both the Chinese and Islamic traditions have long histories of syncretizing foreign elements. Syncretism is an inherently innovative process insofar as its product represents a synthesis and therefore something new and different from the elements that combined to create it. But despite syncretic precedents, both Islam and Confucianism assert a pristine transmission of tradition and dogmatically reject the introduction of innovative thought to the teachings of their founders. Inheriting this internal paradox from two sides, Chinese Islamic syncretism is therefore an exponentially complicated reality.

LIU ZHI'S CLASSICAL INHERITANCE

Wang Daiyu, Ma Zhu, and Liu Zhi are frequently grouped together as the luminaries of Han Kitāb literary production. They are lauded as authors of important original texts, whose work may be considered to represent the next stage in the evolution of the canon after the translation-commentary phase of the late sixteenth through mid-seventeenth centuries. Yet these three authors also inherited directly from their translating predecessors, such that one could argue that their writings were but a continuation of the translation-commentary enterprise and that little of what they wrote may be termed "original" in the modern sense. Of course, the premium placed nowadays on "originality" in research and composition was not generally present in classical intellectual traditions, including those of Islam and Confucianism. To the contrary, antiquity conferred authority, and direct derivation from historical antecedents gave later scholarship its legitimacy. Conversely, claims that something was the "original" product of an individual writer's own mind were met with mistrust, if not outright condemnation.

Islam has long maintained a circumspect attitude toward "innovation" in religious matters. An oft-cited Ḥadīth commands Muslims to adhere unrelentingly to the tradition of Muḥammad and his righteous successors and warns them to beware of novel doctrines or practices that lead the faithful away from the right path and toward hell.[1] And, as the Qurʾān affirms that its message is not an invention of Muḥammad's mind, it commands the Prophet to proclaim, "I am not an innovator among the Messengers . . . I follow only what is revealed to me."[2] The Confucian tradition had similarly claimed its authority from the "ancients." Confucius did not consider himself to be the originator of his teachings,

but claimed to be merely a transmitter of and commentator on the teachings of his eminent forebears, as we recall his famous dictum in the *Lunyu* to that effect.[3] In the sixteenth and seventeeenth centuries, scholars within the Confucian tradition led a backlash against what they considered the unduly speculative nature of Song-Ming Neo-Confucian orthodoxy, calling for a return to ancient texts. Thus, as Chinese Muslims were implementing educational reforms and entering a period of prolific literary output, they did so against the backdrop of the *kaozheng* ("evidentiary studies") literati movement, which advocated a return to the oldest available textual sources and commentary traditions as the basis for legitimate scholarship. In this way, Chinese Muslim scholars found ample precedent on both sides of their dual intellectual heritage to adhere to the time-honored tradition of derivative scholarship and to eschew "originality." Their insistence on the notion of preserving and transmitting received tradition, and the rejection of claims of innovation, thus linked Liu Zhi and his fellow Han Kitāb writers to a series of conservative trends in both the Islamic and Chinese orthodox traditions.

This attitude is evident in the work of the Chinese Muslim scholars instrumental in the Jingtang educational reforms and Han Kitāb literary production. They consciously promoted educational reforms and a literary corpus that defied conventions by merging Islamic beliefs with Confucian concepts and terminology. Yet they nevertheless made explicit and frequent reference to the fact that they were transmitters of a Teaching (*jiao*) and Way (*dao*) as ancient as humankind itself.[4] It was not their aim to invent new doctrines, although their opponents often accused them of doing just that. While conservative critics claimed that the introduction of Chinese language and ideas to the explication of Islam was potentially corruptive, the Chinese Muslim literati defended their commitment to translation as an indispensable tool for transmitting Islamic knowledge in China. The scholars regarded translation and interpretation through the medium of Confucian concepts as nothing more than a method for passing orthodox beliefs and values onto future generations of sinophone Muslims, and they rejected any claim by traditionalists that they were changing or reinventing Islam.

Liu Zhi was quite deliberate in his efforts to establish legitimacy through reference to authoritative sources and antecedents. For instance, in his "Author's Preface" (*Zi xu*) to the *Tianfang dianli* he explained that his book is actually a compendium of a much more voluminous work on Islamic ritual, a translation (from some unknown Islamic source) first undertaken by his father. Thus, Liu Zhi paid homage to the tradition of translation he had inherited from the previous generation: "I have undertaken to carry on the will of my late father by translating the book on the ritual law of Islam completely."[5]

In his "Introduction" (*liyan*), Liu Zhi reaffirmed that the *Tianfang dianli* is a work of translation, and he reinforced the notion that he was only following

established traditions and literary conventions. After briefly describing the format and content of the book, Liu Zhi referred to his sources, namely Chinese and Islamic "classics." He admitted to "selecting and gathering, compiling and editing" various Islamic classics in the process of transmitting them to his audience.[6] But this, after all, is nothing more or less than Confucius had claimed. This portrayal is also consistent with Muḥammad's assertion that the revelation he imparted was only a modified reiteration of previous revelations sent to earlier prophets, a notion that Liu Zhi emphasized in his chapter on the origins of Islam.[7]

Reaffirming the notion that his work was based on tradition and was not merely his own individual invention, Liu Zhi wrote, "I did not presume to penetrate the work with personal opinion, nor did I dare to mix and insert miscellaneous matters in it."[8] After explaining the methodology behind his use of translation and transliteration, he anticipated and pre-emptively defended himself against claims that he was deviating in any way from the canonical sources. He counteracted such criticism by suggesting that his would-be critics were the ones in need of correction and that his orthodox book provides just that: "Gentle reader, do not consider that I am opposing the classics and deviating from custom. To the contrary, this book opposes misguided customs by conforming to the classics, and that is all."[9]

The use of allusive terminology in the titles of his books, as well as in the body of their texts, illustrates Liu Zhi's attempt to show himself as a guardian and perpetuator of classical traditions, while the thorough synthesis of Chinese and Islamic elements in his writing continued along a path of conservative innovation, in the footsteps of previous generations of Chinese Muslim thinkers. A prime example is his use of the term *dianli* in the title of his book on Islamic ritual law, the *Tianfang dianli.* One can explain Liu Zhi's choice of this term on the basis of its literal sense as "ceremonies and rituals." But there is certainly more to it than that. In his introduction to the book, Liu Zhi cited his source of inspiration: a work translated and/or written by his father, about which he stated, "[o]riginally, there was a complete book (or compendium) on ritual law."[10] In continuing his father's work, he could simply have used the same literal terminology his father had used to describe Islamic ritual law, namely *lifa*. But Liu Zhi opted for a more sophisticated title to his adaptation of Liu Sanjie's research, one which both indicated his own erudition and placed the work, and Islam, within the boundaries of Confucian classicism. He chose the term *dianli,* which has its *locus classicus* in the *Yijing*[11] and which, through the centuries, became synonymous with the concept of ritual etiquette, the binding agent of Chinese social order. In classical Islamic thought, ritual practices often also have a strong social component, but are primarily seen as methods of worship and service to God. By choosing the term *dianli* for the title of his book, Liu Zhi linked the devotional piety of Islam

with the eminently social rites of Confucianism, a tradition in which questions of spiritual efficacy are typically downplayed. Liu Zhi's deliberate lexical choices show him straddling a thin line between tradition and innovation as he employed classical allusion to cast a new light on the Chinese study of Islam.

"ORIGINALITY": LIU ZHI'S DEPARTURE FROM TRADITION

Liu Zhi's literary productivity alone would distinguish him among Han Kitāb scholars, but the quality of his writing also raised the level of Islamic scholarship in China to new heights. His books were by far the most systematic of the entire Han Kitāb corpus in terms of their methodology. Liu Zhi divided each of his books into distinct sections dealing with various aspects of Islamic belief and practice, and he similarly divided his body of work into categories and genres that he saw as components of a grand project to explicate Islam in its nuanced entirety, making his work arguably the most comprehensive treatment of Islam written in Chinese before the modern period.

Departing from earlier conventions, or progressing beyond their parameters, Liu Zhi's thought stands out as the most "Chinese" (i.e., Confucianized) of the Han Kitāb literature, and it was in fact recognized as such by prominent non-Muslim Confucians of his day. Furthermore, although he was sometimes quite critical of other religious and philosophical teachings, Liu Zhi's purview was certainly the most panoptic of the entire Han Kitāb corpus in that he addressed virtually every other major tradition in the Chinese cultural landscape—not only the Three Teachings, but also Judaism and Christianity. It would therefore be fair to say that of all the Han Kitāb scholars Liu Zhi went the furthest in bringing Islam into the larger Chinese intellectual discourse of the period. In the process, he built the most extensive conceptual links between Islam and other traditions.

There is no question that Liu Zhi both saw himself and was viewed by others as a continuation of the Chinese Muslim traditions that preceded him. Indeed, as we have seen above, many of the linguistic, stylistic, and conceptual choices he made in his writing reflect his simultaneous reverence for both the Islamic and Confucian traditions and a conscious attempt to show himself as faithful to this dual heritage. But Liu Zhi also took positions outside the conventional framework of established tradition. In some ways, Liu Zhi even surpassed his innovative predecessors Wang Daiyu and Ma Zhu in the degree of "originality" he brought to Chinese Muslim scholarship.

The same body of work that demonstrates Liu Zhi's adherence to tradition also contains evidence to illustrate how Liu Zhi departed, sometimes quite self-consciously, from certain traditions even as he carried on others. For example,

Liu Zhi's work of Arabic orthography and philology, the *Tianfang zimu jieyi* (Explaining the Meaning of Arabic Letters), demonstrates his exploration beyond the established themes and genres of the Jingtang Jiaoyu curriculum and earlier Han Kitāb texts. This work was his contribution to the study of Islamic languages, which was an essential component of Chinese Muslim education. However, unlike the standard grammar texts, lexicons, and dictionaries employed in Jingtang Jiaoyu schools, this book, five thousand characters in length, delves deeper and into much more abstract territory. In this book, Liu Zhi interpreted the origin and meaning of the twenty-eight letters of the Arabic alphabet from a religious, metaphysical, and philosophical point of view.[12]

TRADITIONAL AND INNOVATIVE SOURCES

As we track Liu Zhi's diverse ideas, we are naturally led to an examination of his sources, in which we can see clearly his roots in the "orthodox" literature of both the Islamic and Confucian traditions. Yet among the works he cited there are also a number of sources that are regarded as residing outside the two "orthodox" canons. Like Wang Daiyu and Ma Zhu before him, Liu Zhi admitted Sufi texts into his bibliographies and frequently alluded to Daoist and Buddhist literature. Previous writers of "original" Han Kitāb books employed terminology and concepts from the extracanonical, or heterodox, literary traditions where and when it suited their arguments. Liu Zhi also did so, and he appears to have exceeded his predecessors in the quantity of such sources he cited.

It must be noted here that the distinction between orthodoxy and heterodoxy in both Chinese and Islamic civilization, as in cultures around the world, has always been fluid. Ideas deemed heterodox by one generation may, by the forces of attrition and attraction, come to be absorbed into the mainstream tradition, only to become part of the orthodoxy of another generation. Factions within a single tradition may also debate, even battle, over the definition of orthodoxy. Conservative factions, or revivers of an older vision of orthodoxy, may eschew as heterodox ideas that had already previously been subsumed within the tradition. In Confucian China, "heterodox" teachings of Daoism and Buddhism had been assimilated into the tradition in the great synthetic movements of the Han and then Song dynasties, even as the rhetoric that deemed them heretical persisted. So diffuse in the greater Chinese culture were Daoist and Buddhist ideas that some of the great masters of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism were accused by their detractors of making excessive concessions to the heterodoxy, or even being Daoists and Buddhists disguised in Confucian robes.[13] These men were defenders of Confucian orthodoxy even though they were influenced by non-Confucian ideas that proliferated at all levels of the society around them.

Similarly, in the Islamic world, various teachings collectively subsumed under the title "Sufi" had numerous detractors even as throngs of Muslims were drawn to them. The diffusion of Sufi ideas and practices was so thorough that even famous Muslim critics of Sufism, such as Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328) or his ideological heir Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb (1703–1792), had themselves studied under Sufi teachers. The claim has been made that Sufi teachings were so widespread that, in terms of being influenced by these ideas, by the eighteenth century *all* Muslims were Sufis. Certainly by the time of Liu Zhi and the other Han Kitāb writers who included mystical texts among their Islamic sources, Sufism, while perhaps extracanonical, was as "orthodox" as any anti-Sufi tradition. Thus, while Liu Zhi's use of certain texts may have offended the sensibilities of some of his most conservative critics, his syncretism of diverse ideas and use of a wide range of sources had precedents in the traditions of both sides of his dual heritage.

CHINESE SOURCES

Liu Zhi's use of diverse texts led some Confucians and Muslims to question the orthodoxy of his work. From the Chinese perspective, Liu Zhi quoted liberally from the various canons of the Three Teachings, including reference to Buddhist and Daoist ideas deemed "heterodox" by the Confucian establishment. In fact, in his introduction to the *Tianfang dianli,* he explicitly stated that the book was written for "the reader who thoroughly understands and practices the Three Teachings, but has never known the rites of our Teaching [i.e., Islam]."[14] Other Chinese Muslim writers had alluded to, or even explicitly mentioned, the Three Teachings before, but never in so positive a tone.[15] Liu Zhi's brief reference to the Three Teachings conveys a view consistent with the largely conciliatory religio-philosophical discourse of the period, especially in cosmopolitan Nanjing, where the syncretic trend was firmly entrenched.

Liu Zhi's reference to the Three Teachings also signaled his willingness to accept the collected literature of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism as potential sources for promoting his own theories and arguments. From this position, Liu Zhi could still maintain the established Chinese Muslim scholarly approach of aligning Islam conceptually and ethically with Confucianism and criticizing elements of Buddhism and Daoism as heterodox. But he could also draw upon these "heretical" traditions for terminology to express analogous concepts in Islam as it suited his needs. Certain metaphysical concepts originally derived from Daoism or Buddhism, often filtered through centuries of Neo-Confucian philosophy, would prove especially useful to him in attempts to expound Islamic theology in Chinese, as we shall see later.

Liu Zhi's willingness to use concepts drawn from all of the major Chinese

religious and philosophical schools would not have seemed contradictory to him nor to those of his readers versed in the discourse of late Ming–early Qing period Three Teachings syncretism. In this context, his statement in the introduction makes sense as a disclaimer intended to deflect potential criticism from less open-minded readers, especially among more conservative, parochial Chinese Muslims. Reference to the Three Teachings would not have raised many eyebrows among the majority of mainstream Chinese literati so long as Liu Zhi could also demonstrate, as he did, that Islam was more in agreement with Confucianism than with either Daoism or Buddhism. Indeed, Liu Zhi's erudition showed him to have been "in dialogue not simply with Chinese Muslim scholarship, but with literary traditions of other Chinese communities as well."[16] His ability to demonstrate his broad knowledge of various philosophical schools and religious teachings earned him respect from scholarly readers, both Muslim and, perhaps more significantly, non-Muslim.

Liu Zhi's co-option of ideas from diverse sources was an asset rather than a liability in the impression it made on most of his readers because it had precedents within both the Confucian and Islamic traditions. It recalled the co-option of Daoist and Buddhist concepts by the Song and Ming dynasty Neo-Confucian masters, whose philosophical lineage represented state orthodoxy for the better part of six hundred years. From an Islamic perspective, Liu Zhi's methodology was also reminiscent of the work of the medieval *mutakallimūn,* Muslim theologians who labored to reconcile elements of Hellenistic philosophy with the Qurʾānic revelation. Liu Zhi's willingness to employ the wide variety of sources at his disposal might appear to his more conservative critics as an excessively liberal approach, but his methods remained consistent with the best traditions of Confucianism and Islam, the latter expressed in the Ḥadīth: "The word of wisdom is the lost treasure of the believer, and so he has the truest claim to it wherever he finds it."[17]

Liu Zhi took this notion of valid sources to great lengths, leading him to treat the texts of multiple traditions, including rival schools of thought within those traditions, as fodder for citation in support of his ideas. For example, under the general rubric of Confucian literature, Liu Zhi did not discriminate between the canons of the Six Classics and the Four Books on the one hand and the speculative philosophy of later Neo-Confucian thinkers on the other. This stands in contrast to the strategy employed by Ricci, who sought Christian accommodation with the "natural religion" of the ancient classics and the teachings of "primitive" Confucianism, but eschewed Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism, which he viewed as having been corrupted by accretions of Buddhist and Daoist concepts. Liu Zhi made no such distinction, thereby freeing himself to cite all sorts of Confucian literature, including the aforementioned canonical books as well as the writings of Xunzi (ca. 310–237 BCE), Han Yu (768–824), the Cheng brothers (Cheng Hao,

1032–1085, and Cheng Yi, 1033–1107), Zhu Xi (1130–1200), and Lu Xiangshan (1139–1192), among others. That some of these thinkers and their later exponents often clashed with each other did not deter him from including their writings in his bricolage of sources and ideas.

If Liu Zhi did not discriminate between factions and schools within the greater Confucian tradition, he certainly would not have distinguished between such divisions among Daoists or Buddhists. As described above, his use of concepts taken from the non-Confucian and non-Islamic traditions was intended to serve one of two possible purposes. In some cases, he co-opted certain of their terms or concepts that had already been naturalized into the syncretic Chinese religio-philosophical discourse, and were therefore no longer specifically Daoist or Buddhist, in order to express a corresponding Islamic tenet. In other instances, he referred directly to beliefs or practices of Daoism or Buddhism, citing their discordance with both Confucian and Muslim ideas of orthodoxy, in order to highlight the distance between Islam and the "heterodoxies" reviled by Confucianism.

Liu Zhi's use of Buddhist and Daoist ideas for comparison and contrast with Islamic concepts was consistent with the predominant Chinese intellectual discourse of his day, in which scholars of various schools engaged in debate. In this, Liu Zhi continued a discursive trend, following in the footsteps of his Han Kitāb forebears. For example, Wang Daiyu was known to have socialized and participated in spirited discussions about various religio-philosophical subjects with representatives of different traditions and faith communities, the substance of these exchanges informing his writings. Wang Daiyu and Liu Zhi were both residents of Nanjing, China's most cosmopolitan city at the time and a center of learning for many schools of thought. Growing up in such an environment they were naturally influenced by the traffic of ideas that buzzed around them, and they benefited from the unrivaled access to texts in the city's libraries and bookshops. The broad range of religious and philosophical teachings available to them helped to expand the scope of Chinese Islamic intellectual discourse in the writings of these two famous Nanjing Muslims. Therefore, Ford is able to say of them: "Like Wang Tai-yü, Liu wanted to escape from the old inward-looking Islamic attitude and show himself a real universalist, and he went further in that direction than Wang had done."[18]

One of the ways Liu Zhi's universalism exceeded Wang Daiyu's was in his overt and documented use of diverse sources, which went beyond even the canons and secondary literature of the Three Teachings. While traces of Chinese Catholic influence may be gleaned in the writings of Wang Daiyu or Ma Zhu, Liu Zhi was the first of the Han Kitāb writers to refer unabashedly to Christian literature. Modern scholars have debated the meaning of Liu Zhi's claim in his preface to the *Tianfang zhizheng shilu* that he had read "one hundred thirty-seven types of Occidental" books. Many Catholic texts, translations and/or compositions

by Jesuit missionaries and/or Chinese converts, had already been in circulation for almost a century by the time Liu Zhi began to publish his work. The Jesuit presence was particularly strong in Nanjing, a hotbed of intellectual activity and interfaith dialogue, where a number of prominent Jesuit missionaries, beginning with Ricci, had earned high rank and honor in Chinese literati circles. These factors contributed to a widespread literati acceptance of the Catholic texts as a noteworthy addition to the literature of the day; even if many Chinese readers found the Jesuits' claims irreconcilably alien or untenable, they could not simply ignore them. And since it is well documented that the Jesuits had taken a scholarly interest in the Chinese Jewish community, we may also assume that Jewish writings, directly or indirectly, influenced the Han Kitāb writers. Thus by the time Liu Zhi had entered the stream, the Jewish and Christian literature was already part of the current.

ISLAMIC SOURCES

Liu Zhi did not discriminate when it came to his Islamic sources either. Among the bibliographical lists Liu Zhi included in some of his more famous books, one finds a remarkably wide range of Islamic literature, representing multiple genres. In addition to the Qurʾān, there are commentaries on scripture (*tafsīr*); a Ḥadīth collection; various works of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*); manuals on Muslim practice; books on the life of the Prophet Muḥammad (*sīra*) and other prophets and saints; several texts on Sufi philosophy and devotional piety; and a number of philological, geographical, and astronomical works.

Leslie and Wassel have identified nearly all of the sixty-six[19] titles listed by Liu Zhi in bibliographies in the *Tianfang xingli* and *Tianfang dianli.* Their findings led to the following conclusions about the diverse origins of Liu Zhi's Islamic sources:

1. Many of the texts, especially those (originally written) in Arabic, are standard Sunni Hanafite texts of law and ritual.
2. Very few if any are Shīʿa. However, the Kubrāwiyya sect, Sunni but with Shīʿa connections, is prominent.
3. Many works, especially those in Persian, are Sufi. Besides the Kubrāwiyya, the influence of the Naqshabandi Sufi Jāmī is evident.
4. There are almost certainly more works in Persian listed than in Arabic.
5. Most are almost certainly extant in the West.
6. We may postulate a link with Central Asian Muslim sources, then Persian, and only finally with the original Arabic sources.[20]

His bibliographies demonstrate that, beyond what might be considered a standard Sunni upbringing, Liu Zhi was also willing to incorporate a wide range of Islamic concepts into his writing and worldview. The distance of the other Han Kitāb writers, and Chinese Muslims in general, from the central Islamic world certainly played a role in Liu Zhi's ability to read all sorts of Islamic literature without prejudice. That is to say, he read these Arabic and Persian texts in Nanjing, in the heart of the Chinese culture area, and entirely without the context of current or historical debates within the Muslim intellectual world. Under these circumstances, he may not have been aware that he was dealing with potentially divisive material. It would appear instead that he saw any text in Arabic or Persian, whatever he could find, as legitimately stemming from the Islamic heartland and thus containing truth, paying little or no attention to whether a book was Sufi, Shīʿa, or Sunni.

Perhaps the cosmopolitan attitude of Chinese literati culture in Nanjing, reflected in his assimilation of Neo-Confucianism and even tolerance of Three Teachings pluralism and syncretism, had also spilled over into his treatment of diversity within Islam. Of course, it is also likely that his decision to use so many different styles of Islamic literature was dictated in large part by the availability of books in China, as Liu Zhi's lists of sources has been described as "in sum, a complete catalogue of all the known Arabic and Persian works in China around the year 1700."[21]

SUFI SOURCES

Sufi texts are both significant and abundant among Liu Zhi's sources. The infusion of Sufi thought in the Jingtang Jiaoyu curriculum and the Han Kitāb corpus was an innovation that had already taken root in Chinese Muslim scholarship in the generations preceding Liu Zhi. Thus while the spread of Sufi ideas in central and eastern China may have represented a departure from the more conservative exoteric tradition, Liu Zhi's co-option of theoretical Sufism in his writings was utterly consistent with the trend seen in the Chinese Muslim scholarly network throughout the seventeenth century. Indeed, as stated above, virtually all Muslim intellectual work of this period anywhere in the world was imbued with or influenced by Sufi thought. Thus Liu Zhi's assimilation of Sufism reflected what was really a universal phenomenon in Islamic scholarship and not a peculiarly Chinese trend, even though its manifestation in the Han Kitāb corpus assumed uniquely Chinese characteristics.[22]

Books such as the *Mirṣād al-ʿIbād min al-Mabdā ila'l-Maʿād* by al-Rāzī (d. 1256) had become staples of the Jingtang Jiaoyu curriculum by the time Liu Zhi embarked on his study of the Islamic canon. Liu Zhi listed this work, under both

its Chinese translated and transliterated titles, in the bibliographies of the *Tianfang xingli* and *Tianfang dianli.* It was obviously an influential source for him, as it was for many Chinese Muslim literati, and was one of a handful of Sufi texts to which he repeatedly referred.[23] Of these, four sources are cited more often than any others: (1) The *Mirṣād*; (2) *Maqṣad i Aqṣà*;[24] (3) *Ashiʿʿat al-Lamaʿāt*;[25] and (4) *Lawāʾiḥ fī Bayān Maʿāni ʿIrfaniyya.*[26] These four books figure so prominently among Liu Zhi's sources that he included them in what he called the "basic texts" (*benjing,* lit. "root classics") of the *Tianfang xingli.* Leslie and Wassel state that, given their centrality among his sources, these "mainly Sufi works" constitute "the core of Liu Chih's philosophy and cosmogony."[27]

All four of Liu Zhi's "root classics" were translated into Chinese by Han Kitāb scholars.[28] That the first three titles above were available to Liu Zhi as Chinese sources illustrates clearly how Sufism had already infused the Chinese Muslim educational curriculum and scholarly network by the time he began his literary career. Liu Zhi himself translated the fourth text, the *Lawāʾiḥ,* reinforcing what we have already observed about his scholarship being deeply rooted in the traditions that preceded it. Thus, in addition to being an innovator and author of "original" Han Kitāb literature, Liu Zhi was also a translator after the tradition of the previous generations of Chinese Muslim scholars. And although his use of Sufi literature and concepts was not his own innovation but rather the continuation of an existing practice, Liu Zhi did provide his readers and bequeath to posterity a comprehensive list of his sources, Sufi and otherwise, that distinguishes him from his predecessors.

Sufi texts and ideas were circulating in the Chinese Muslim scholarly network by the middle of the seventeenth century, when Wang Daiyu's metaphysical and theological formulations showed clear signs of mystical influence. But because "Wang almost never cites Arabic words or mentions the names of Muslim scholars in his writings . . . it would be difficult to make anything more than circumstantial arguments for such influence."[29] By contrast, Liu Zhi's remarkably systematic approach to scholarship produced a meticulous cataloguing of his Islamic sources. There is a strong resemblance among a number of theories in the writing of the two Nanjing-based scholars, particularly on the subject of Divine Unity (i.e., *tawḥīd*). However, due to his more systematic methods, we are better able to trace Sufi concepts and their origins in Liu Zhi's writing than in either Wang Daiyu's or Ma Zhu's. Also, because Liu Zhi was active about a half century after Wang Daiyu and a generation after Ma Zhu, he likely had access to a greater number and range of sources, including more Sufi texts. Therefore, it is not only true that Liu Zhi provided more explicit evidence of his Sufi influences, but he probably also read and cited more Sufi books than other Chinese Muslim scholars before him.

As we have observed, in the early days of the Chinese Muslim educational

reforms, the paucity of printed books led to an eagerness to acquire any and all available Islamic literature. The inclusion of Sufi texts in the curriculum, however, was not merely the result of a completely random process. There is strong evidence to suggest that other sinicized Muslims of the late Ming–early Qing period were already under the influence of Sufi spiritual beliefs and intellectual traditions from Central Asia. After all, the pioneer of the Jingtang educational reforms, Hu Dengzhou, whose translation of Islamic texts formed the roots of the Han Kitāb corpus, acquired many of the books he used on his journey into Central Asia and the Middle East. Whether he had been exposed to Sufi teachings before leaving China we cannot be sure, but we can safely assume that during his travels he would have come into direct contact with individuals or communities for whom Sufi ideas were not merely theoretical abstractions but part of a living tradition of devotional practice. We have no documentary evidence to indicate to what extent, if any, Hu Dengzhou was initiated in Sufi practice. It is clear, however, that the educational and curricular reforms he implemented upon his return to China, and the body of literature to grow out of them, were influenced by Sufism from the outset. Thus the dual factors of a desire to expand the curriculum and the appeal of theoretical Sufism operated together in the evolution of Chinese Muslim scholarship and persisted as the burgeoning scholarly network turned its attention to translating Islamic texts into Chinese.

As the Chinese Muslim curriculum grew considerably with the inclusion of the early Han Kitāb translations, many continued to read, translate, and teach Sufi texts. The use of certain Sufi books became institutionalized among the Chinese Muslim scholarly network. Many Sufi concepts had become fully naturalized, treated as equal expressions of Islamic orthodoxy as any drawn from standard religious sources. Indeed, in their translations and discussions of these mystical texts, Chinese Muslim scholars grouped them together with other Islamic literature, including the Qurʾān and Ḥadīth, under the common rubric *jing,* which is used in Chinese to describe philosophical and religious "classics" in general.[30] Sufi books became an indispensable source of Islamic knowledge, put on a par with classical Chinese and Islamic literature, and their use was governed by conscious choice as much as, if not more than, by necessity.

Thus, if Liu Zhi did not use Sufism more extensively than his Han Kitāb predecessors did, he certainly did so more unabashedly, documenting his Sufi sources openly and meticulously. The confident expression of Muslim identity and the systematic nature of his writing may have been influenced by precedents he had seen in the work of Ma Zhu. On the other hand, the spirit of his scholarship, it has been observed, was much more derivative of Wang Daiyu, though Liu Zhi was even more universalistic in his outlook. His universalism was manifested in the wide variety of texts, both Chinese and Islamic, that he incorporated as sources.

From the Chinese side of his heritage, Neo-Confucianism represented almost seven hundred years of syncretism. Thus, although it was the state orthodoxy of the day and as such could be intolerant of Buddhist or Daoist beliefs and practices deemed heterodox, it had nevertheless assimilated many elements from both of these traditions, synthesizing a comprehensive system of metaphysics. From the Islamic side of his heritage, the rich tradition of intellectual Sufism offered Liu Zhi theological and cosmological options that complimented exoteric interpretations of Islamic scriptural traditions, whereby he could build conceptual links to the syncretic Chinese traditions.

A LASTING LEGACY

Quite naturally, Liu Zhi's most direct influences came from those scholars who preceded him most proximally. We can see clear influences from his father, Liu Sanjie, from whom he inherited his desire to study and teach about Islam, particularly its history, both abroad and in China, as well as its laws and customs. Liu Zhi was certainly also influenced by his teacher, Yuan Ruqi, a maternal cousin of Liu Sanjie. Relatively little has been recorded about Yuan Ruqi's scholarship beyond the fact that "he was known as a good orator and also a poet."[31] Yuan Ruqi's connection to the scholarly and pedagogical traditions of his father, Yuan Shengzhi, is important, for it is through this line that we may trace Liu Zhi's interests in philology and, perhaps, Sufism.[32]

Liu Zhi was clearly also influenced by the two "original" Han Kitāb writers who preceded him: Wang Daiyu and Ma Zhu. Liu Zhi's outlook and the content of his writings bear the strongest resemblance to those of Wang Daiyu. Liu Zhi, however, actually went beyond the precedents set by Wang Daiyu, who had used Confucian concepts and terms, but always "maintained the fundamental truths and superiority of Islam."[33] Liu Zhi sometimes also implied the superiority of Islam, but his writings often suggest that Islam and Confucianism were both manifestations of the same principle of truth. To Liu Zhi, Islam was slightly more complete in its spiritual expressions, but by positing an "ethical parallelism, Liu Zhi placed Islam and Confucianism on an equal footing."[34] In other words, Liu Zhi went to greater lengths to accommodate the dominant Confucian paradigm into his universal vision of Islam. He justified this in a preface to the *Tianfang xingli,* where he wrote of the necessity of thoroughly understanding all Chinese teachings lest "Islamic scholarship . . . be confined to one corner, and . . . not be the common learning of the world."[35]

We may even detect a note of proselytism in this statement, a sentiment that Chinese Muslims rarely if ever indulged. Liu Zhi may not have been preaching the conversion of China to Islam, but just that Islam and Confucianism partook

of the same universal truth and could therefore coexist in complete harmony. Even so, the degree to which Liu Zhi absorbed Confucian ideas into his view and presentation of Islam in Chinese "was more marked than that of any other Muslim and it has sometimes been questioned whether he did not compromise his Muslim principles."[36] Lipman aptly describes Liu Zhi's view as straddling the line "between Wang Daiyu's feisty defense of Islamic uniqueness and the writings of entirely acculturated scholars from ex-Muslim families, which are indistinguishable from non-Muslim texts."[37]

Despite the similarities between Liu Zhi's work and Wang Daiyu's, a major difference in their methodologies is clearly noticeable. Unlike Wang Daiyu, who approached his work in an admittedly informal manner, Liu Zhi was meticulously systematic in his writing. In this regard, he may have found inspiration in the writing of Ma Zhu, whose *Qingzhen zhinan* in the previous generation set a new standard for systematic presentation among the Han Kitāb. Like Ma Zhu, Liu Zhi made sure to adorn the beginning of his books with as many laudatory prefaces as he could obtain. Showing himself to be more cosmopolitan and better recognized than his predecessor, however, Liu Zhi included a few prefaces written by prominent non-Muslim Confucian scholars besides those from fellow Muslims.

If Ma Zhu exerted any direct influence upon Liu Zhi's scholarship, it was surely in the areas of layout and presentation. Like the *Qingzhen zhinan,* Liu Zhi's major works are extremely well organized, divided into discrete chapters arranged topically. However, unlike Ma Zhu, whose book is comprehensive, covering the gamut of Islamic orthodoxy and orthopraxy in a single tome, Liu Zhi opted to write multiple books, each covering in great detail a specific aspect of Islam. Thus he is best known for his "*Tianfang* trilogy": the *Tianfang xingli, Tianfang dianli,* and *Tianfang zhisheng shilu.* There is, to be sure, a certain amount of overlap within Liu Zhi's prodigious body of works, but each is devoted to a single main theme. Liu Zhi also carefully arranged his books into topical chapters with an eye toward the progression of ideas not only within these chapters, but also from the beginning of the book to the end.

His view of the systematic unfolding of ideas extended even further. In an autobiographical essay about the process of writing appended to his last major work, the *Tianfang zhisheng shilu,* Liu Zhi sought to explain how his various distinct books were to be read in concert to complete a grand study of the "metaconcepts" of Chinese Islam. First describing the intensive study of diverse traditions that prepared him for his career as an author, Liu Zhi then wrote of his literary endeavor in general and the "*Tianfang* trilogy" in particular. He expressed a clear concern with the systematic, methodical presentation of his ideas and a grand vision: "Thus, as far as these books are concerned, they are three yet

actually constitute one whole. They were published in incremental steps as I attained mastery over [their subject matter] to some extent."[38]

Liu Zhi cited his motivation for writing his biography of the Prophet Muḥammad as the desire to "explain the profound origins of the Teaching and the Way," which is related to another innovative aspect of his methodology. The interconnected notions of reliable sources and legitimate origins were extremely important to Liu Zhi. We can clearly see this connection not only in his writing of the *Tianfang zhisheng shilu,* but also in his interest, inherited from his father, in chronicling the "historical" origins of Islam in China in his *Huihui shuo.* His interest in establishing the origins of Islam is also apparent in the *Tianfang dianli,* whose first chapter, titled "*Yuanjiao*" (either "The Original Teaching" or "Origin and the Teaching," depending on interpretation), attempts to place Islam at the center of human history by tracing its origins from Adam through Muḥammad. Liu Zhi's emphasis on origins certainly has something to do with his desire to confer upon Islam and Chinese Muslims an air of authenticity, orthodoxy, and legitimacy. This, as we have seen, was a central concern of Chinese Muslim scholars in the late Ming–early Qing period, and Liu Zhi enthusiastically took it up himself.

Liu Zhi's related interest in authentic sources to support his portrayal of Islamic legitimacy also helps to explain why he was the first Han Kitāb writer to publish lists of his textual sources in his books. Albeit an innovation within the Chinese Muslim literary genre, Liu Zhi's documentation of his sources also clearly demonstrates his living connection to the traditions out of which he emerged. To wit, his bibliographies in the Han Kitāb "further clarify our understanding of the ways in which Chinese Muslim scholarship was invariably produced in an ongoing conversation with earlier works and ideas."[39] Serving as a link in the chain of Chinese Muslim literati, Liu Zhi's innovation was also a model for future generations of scholars.[40]

Liu Zhi's concern with the presentation of authentic sources was part of the impetus toward the greater systematization that he brought to Chinese Islamic scholarship. In this regard, besides putting on display his recondite Islamic learning, he also emulated time-honored practices of Chinese scholarship. Listing his sources gave Liu Zhi's scholarship an appearance of greater formality and authority, which in turn increased the credibility of his theories and arguments for a literate audience. Bibliographies were a recognized symbol of erudition among Chinese literati and were of increasing importance in the Confucian textual studies movement of the day.[41] Liu Zhi, aware of this trend and wishing to add rigor to his work, thus raised the standard of Chinese Islamic scholarship. This likely also resulted in greater prestige for himself and other Muslims in the eyes of educated Chinese elites, both Muslim and non-Muslim.

COMMENDATION AND CRITICISM

Liu Zhi's accomplishments were recognized by his contemporaries, both Muslim and non-Muslim, and have continued to be admired by later generations down to the present day. He also had his detractors, but they were far fewer and less articulate than those who have praised him and his work. It is only natural, perhaps, that a scholar who ventured so boldly into new intellectual territory should have ruffled some feathers along the way, but the response to his work was, on the whole, extremely positive. Liu Zhi's Muslim literati colleagues sang his praises in prefaces to several of his important works. These Muslim friends and associates, in addition to lauding Liu Zhi's scholarly attainments and literary accomplishments, also tended to speak in superlative terms about his personal qualities of diligence and his moral virtue. For instance, his teacher, Yuan Ruqi, wrote of him in a preface to the *Tianfang xingli:*

> What sort of a man is Jielian? Is he not a great man? He is not great in terms of worldly affairs, but rather in terms of morality—the virtue of the Way. He is not great in terms of human ability, but rather in terms of what people are unable to do. That is how he achieved his indefatigability. How great indeed![42]

Admiration from his elders and contemporaries notwithstanding, the legacy Liu Zhi left to later generations of Chinese Muslim scholars was especially important. Yuan Ruqi's grandson, Yuan Guozuo (b. 1712), was strongly influenced by Liu Zhi's writings and played a major role in their propagation among subsequent generations. He edited and published, or republished, several of Liu Zhi's books. Around 1780, he published the *Tianfang zhisheng shilu,* complete with a preface and postscript of his own. In the preface, he echoed his grandfather's praise of Liu Zhi's virtues in the most Confucian of terms: "Master Liu's loyalty, filiality, benevolence and kindness truly were inconceivable."[43]

In addition to these personal qualities, Yuan Guozuo also showed a deep appreciation for Liu Zhi's pivotal role in the lineage of Islamic scholarship:

> Not only did he perform meritorious service to the sages of the past, but he has also brought profound benefit to the generations that came after him. If Master Liu had not continued his father's will, endlessly magnifying the benevolent favor of the Teaching of the sage, how could there have been such dazzling brilliance as this?[44]

The association of Liu Zhi with the "sages of the past" went even further among

some of his Muslim admirers. Within certain Chinese Muslim circles, Liu Zhi has posthumously been afforded almost saint-like status. To wit, the marker at his tomb in Nanjing refers to him as an "ancient worthy" (*xianxian*).[45]

Yuan Guozuo's profound admiration of Liu Zhi and his writings may also have contributed to the greatest distinction afforded to any Han Kitāb book, namely the inclusion of the *Tianfang dianli* in the *Siku quanshu* (Compendium of the Four Treasuries). This compendium, commissioned by the Qianlong emperor, was compiled between 1773 and 1782, about half a century after Liu Zhi's death. Yuan Guozuo may well have answered the imperial court's call for books and manuscripts from around the realm, leading him to compile his own list of extant Chinese Islamic texts.[46] The *Tianfang dianli* was prominent among the titles in Yuan Guozuo's bibliography, a fact that might have contributed to the book's inclusion in the *Siku quanshu.* It may also have been presented, together with Liu Zhi's two other most famous works (the *Tianfang xingli* and *Tianfang zhisheng shilu*) to the Qianlong emperor in 1782.[47]

Surely another factor in the recognition of the *Tianfang dianli,* and of Liu Zhi's scholarship in general, was the approval and respect he earned from influential non-Muslim Chinese readers. After completing the book, Liu Zhi traveled to Beijing with the manuscript, probably in an attempt to present it to the court. He did not achieve this ambition, but he did manage to meet in the capital with a number of high-ranking Confucian officials, developing friendly and collegial relations with several of these influential men. As a result, Liu Zhi "achieved considerable fame and moved in exalted circles for part of his life."[48]

These relationships demonstrate that Liu Zhi saw himself as existing in a broad scholarly community "that was not inevitably circumscribed by Islam."[49] This self-perception was justified by the fact that he received favorable responses to his work from non-Muslims in addition to the endorsements and commendations from his co-religionists. The positive reactions of some non-Muslim literati to Liu Zhi's writings were likely both a cause and an effect of his extremely conciliatory attitude toward Confucianism and his impeccable scholarly methodology. That is, Liu Zhi's desire to appeal to an audience beyond his own ethno-religious community inspired him to incorporate a wide range of sources and assimilate, or at least address, a diversity of views. It also caused him to delve more deeply into the culture of Confucian scholarship and adopt its rhetorical language and methods more than any other Chinese Muslim writer had before him. These features did not go unnoticed by the Confucian scholars who read his work and led them to greater acceptance of Liu Zhi, and by extension Islam, which in turn reinforced Liu Zhi's outlook and approach.

Seeking advice and constructive criticism, Liu Zhi solicited comments from Muslim and non-Muslim literati. Citing these motivations, he wrote, "As

for whether or not my selections were appropriate, and whether the language in which they are expressed is elegant, I especially hope that those who share my purpose will give their opinions."[50] Beyond this, however, we may also speculate that Liu Zhi was seeking the approval and imprimatur of the Confucian literati. Some of them were willing to write prefaces to his books. Naturally, the prefaces that were published are all extremely enthusiastic toward his work. We do not know whether others he solicited replied with less favorable comments.

In contrast to the Muslim preface writers mentioned above, whose praise tended to emphasize Liu Zhi's high moral character first and his scholarly attainments second, the non-Muslim writers focused more on his literary ability before his manifestation of Confucian virtues. In general, the common opinion expressed by these scholars was twofold: They were pleasantly surprised to discover from Liu Zhi's presentation that Islam was so congenial to their own Confucianism, and they quite admired Liu Zhi's diligence and literary talent, which allowed him to convey that impression. Since Liu Zhi's harmonization of Confucian and Islamic ideals assured non-Muslim readers that Islam was not a threat to Chinese political and social norms, his work, out of all the Han Kitāb literature, received the strongest approval among non-Muslim literati. Judging from the laudatory language of several of his preface writers, he truly earned their respect, not only for demonstrating good Confucian values, but also for his broad knowledge and elegant writing style.

Some of the most lavish praises from non-Muslim readers are found in prefaces to the *Tianfang dianli,* a fact that likely later helped recommend the book to be included in the *Siku quanshu.* Three of the prefaces were written by non-Muslim *jinshi,* holders of the highest civil degree, two of them vice ministers.[51] The first of these, Lu You, was a vice minister of the Board of War.[52] His 1709 preface begins with his admission to holding some anti-Islamic bias before meeting Liu Zhi and reading his book: "The Teaching of Islam came from Arabia where the people are so sharply different from us . . . (so) in the past, I had tended to suspect that they had established a teaching outside the pale of our Confucianism . . . tantamount to the proliferation of Daoism and Buddhism."[53] However, after receiving Liu Zhi in his home and discussing topics of philosophy and metaphysics with him at great length, Lu You agreed to read the *Tianfang dianli,* and he "saw its detailed expressions and subtle meanings to be absolutely reasonable and erudite."[54] Furthermore, he found Liu Zhi's arguments so persuasive that after reading the book, he could declare that "the teachings of Islam were neither slanted nor biased, but were aligned perfectly with the teachings of the Chinese sages; in principle they are the same, and their Way is entirely in harmony."[55] Moreover, "we cannot speak of them in the same breath as those heterodoxies and twisted theories."[56]

Lu You attributed his newfound appreciation for Islam to Liu Zhi's erudition

and literary skill, commenting specifically on the "concise and methodical" organization of his discourse.[57] Thus it would appear that Liu Zhi's systematic approach to his subject matter, innovative among the Han Kitāb, made an extremely positive impression upon his reader. Reading further, we detect the genuine admiration Lu You developed for Liu Zhi. He was especially complimentary of Liu Zhi's universal outlook, his consummate literacy, and his ability to harmonize the diverse traditions he had undertaken to master:

> I am delighted by Master Liu's broad knowledge and rare talent for expression. His mind is on the infinite and universal; he is not only proficient in the Islamic canon, but also has a thorough understanding of the Chinese classics, and he has blended them harmoniously and woven them together to write a book in order to clarify these teachings.[58]

Liu Zhi's writing reassured Lu You that Islam was no threat to social order, leading him to say of the *Tianfang dianli:* "Among its thoroughgoing sections there is nothing ambiguously phrased, nor is there any word that would alarm the world or frighten the common people."[59] Yet he went even further in his commendation of the book and its author, comparing the work to the inviolable texts of the Confucian canon:

> (Master Liu) is able to fathom the depths and search the invisible, so as to reach the most essential mysteries. . . . This book on ritual may almost be as notable in Heaven and Earth as the Six Classics. Whoever reads this book, pondering deeply, will have something to gain therefrom—grasping the origin and holding the foundation, as if it were right in front of them. Heaven and man are both fully expressed. Both the invisible and the obvious obtain the same final result.[60]

The writer of the second preface to the *Tianfang dianli* was Xu Zhuo, a vice minister of the Board of Rites.[61] His 1709 appraisal of Liu Zhi and his writing, though perhaps less effusive in its tone, nonetheless echoes the major themes covered by Lu You:

> This Master Liu has used Confucian terminology to transmit Western learning, in order to instruct his colleagues and co-religionists. While geography has its "east" and "west," Principle knows no borders. As for this ritual, although it comes from Arabia, nevertheless its Principle penetrates the whole world. We and those of our group should not begrudge Master Liu his knowledge and ability. In terms of the

> capacity to transform people, the mind and Principle are the same. It is not contrary to any of the correct doctrines in Heaven and Earth, and there is no doubt in its spirit. How much more should we grant Master Liu a hearing when he speaks of the "Way of Heaven" and "Way of Man" in an unusually comprehensive fashion? If scholars can apply themselves to studying this book, then they would fulfill the saying of the classics that "man should completely conform to Heaven." And how can this ideal be confined by any geographical boundary?[62]

Like Lu You, Xu Zhuo focused on the universality of Liu Zhi's ideas, implying their compatibility to Neo-Confucian doctrines. He also reiterated the common opinion of all the preface writers—that Liu Zhi's knowledge and rare ability to express these sophisticated concepts distinguish him from other scholars.

The writer of the third preface to the *Tianfang dianli* was also a non-Muslim official. This was a *jinshi* named Jing Rizhen, imperial censor of the Shaanxi Circuit in 1707 when he wrote on behalf of Liu Zhi.[63] In his preface, Jing Rizhen focused in particular on Liu Zhi's theories about "oneness." He appears to have inferred from the discussion not only lessons on metaphysical monism (or, from an Islamic perspective, Divine Unity), but also the idea of being able to unify diverse phenomena on the human plane. He praised Liu Zhi's ability to delve into a wide variety of literary sources and genres and "reconcile all of them with the Six Classics."[64] However, he seems to have particularly appreciated Liu Zhi's ability to demonstrate the worldly applicability of his ideas. He commented specifically on the conversation they shared "on the causes of peace and disorder, and prosperity and destruction, from ancient times to the present day," and on such diverse topics as astronomy and geography.[65] Moreover, he saw this entire discourse as relating to the supreme Neo-Confucian ideal of the "complete union of Heaven and man" to which Liu Zhi often refers throughout the *Tianfang dianli.*

Jing Rizhen also spoke admiringly of Liu Zhi's personal qualities, calling him "mild-mannered and restrained, studious and fond of books."[66] These are the scholarly traits that enabled Liu Zhi to perform such an extraordinary work of reconciliation, in which, according to Jing Rizhen, he lived up to the standard for study established by the Han dynasty scholar (and paragon of filial piety) Huang Xiang (53–117 CE). Such praise is extraordinary, as is Jing Rizhen's final passage, which raises Liu Zhi up as an example of universal scholarly virtue: "I relate what he has studied and compiled in order to inform those in the world who are not fond of learning or are not good at it. When they hear how the gentleman Liu has devoted himself to study, they will know how to return to virtue."[67]

The general tone of Liu Zhi's non-Muslim preface writers was positive, extolling both his personal qualifications as a scholar and, moreover, his remarkable

achievement of bringing Islam into the arena of legitimate and acceptable Chinese intellectual discourse. It may be that in an era of great change and diversity, such as the Kangxi period, some Confucians were willing to embrace the work of scholars whom their forebears may not have received so favorably. During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Confucian orthodoxy faced challenges from movements both within and outside its own ideological community. The arbiters of this orthodoxy were happy to encounter intellectuals from diverse backgrounds who shared their values. Scholars like Liu Zhi, whose writings reflected a commitment to orthodox Confucian ideals despite their Islamic context, could be recruited as allies in the struggle against the influences of Buddhism, Daoism, and other teachings deemed heterodox.

Liu Zhi was well aware of these cultural and intellectual dynamics of his time, and so he deliberately aligned himself, and Islam, with the Confucian tradition. He did this by invoking, among other things, the teachings of the ancient Chinese sages, whom he deftly equated with Muḥammad. The success of his approach is indicated by the strong approval he received from non-Muslim readers, as epitomized in an oft-cited 1708 preface to the *Tianfang xingli* by Xu Yuanzheng,[68] who wrote:

> Master Liu's translation into Chinese also teaches about China and that which China holds dear. This book brings back into view the Way of the ancient sages: Yan and Shun, Yu and Tang, King Wen, King Wu, the Duke of Zhou, and Confucius. Thus, although this book was written to explain Islam, it actually glorifies and magnifies our own Confucianism. How could we have known that the breadth of Master Liu's mind was so extensive, or that his work would stretch so far back into the past?[69]

Such admiration of Liu Zhi's universalism, congeniality toward Confucianism, and methodical approach to scholarship notwithstanding, his writings were not unanimously praised. As might be expected, criticisms of his work were not preserved in the same way as the laudatory responses that were included in his books. In fact, among traditional sources contemporary with Liu Zhi, I do not know of any recorded denunciations of his work. But there is good reason to accept Lipman's claim that he was frequently "criticized by both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars as too Confucian, too conciliatory to China's hegemonic philosophical discourse."[70] We may infer much of the substance of this criticism from the subtext of Liu Zhi's own writings and of those who wrote on his behalf.

There are a few telling phrases in the more confessional passages of the prefaces, introductions, and essays Liu Zhi appended to his books, in which he

reveals his awareness of criticism. For example, in his own preface to the *Tianfang dianli,* Liu Zhi spoke of his motivation for writing the book, and how he made every effort to render the text accessible to readers who may not be familiar with the subject of Islamic ritual. He explained that some concepts were especially difficult to express and how he used different methodological approaches to such problematic sections. He ends the passage saying, "There are matters that are quite ordinary, but which the narrow-minded slander as being strange [or heterodox]. In these cases, I anticipate and give voice to their questions, and answer them so as to cure them of their perplexities."[71]

Liu Zhi was aware of opposition to his ideas and/or methods and was willing to confront both actual and potential detractors in his writing. Among those he would have had to answer were the representatives of a more conservative brand of Chinese Muslim traditionalism. Like other Han Kitāb writers, Liu Zhi suffered "the scorn of Muslim traditionalists, who called them antiscriptural and perverters of customs."[72] Within the context of the great changes that befell Chinese Muslim communities during the late Ming–early Qing period, the resistance by the more traditional religious authorities to innovations brought by the new wave of Islamic education and scholarship in China is easily understandable.

In his introduction, or "Instructions" (*liyan*), to the *Tianfang dianli,* Liu Zhi confronted directly those who accused him of being antiscriptural or perverting custom, as he wrote: "Gentle reader, do not consider that I am opposing the classics and deviating from custom. This book opposes misguided customs by conforming to the classics, and that is all."[73] Interestingly, in this and similar passages, it is difficult to determine whether Liu Zhi's perceived critics are Muslims or non-Muslims. The word he uses, *jing,* is translated here as "classics," a standard rendering in anglophone sinology to refer to the Confucian canon. As we know, however, *jing* is also used by Daoists and Buddhists to refer to their canons, and has been used by Chinese Jews and Christians to refer to theirs. Thus, depending on the context, *jing* may also be translated as "scripture(s)." In the Han Kitāb, and particularly in the broad syncretism of Liu Zhi's usage, *jing* may be understood as referring to the Islamic scriptures, principally to the Qurʾān and Ḥadīth, but also to other Islamic texts, as well as the Chinese classics, or to all of these. No single, consistent English translation for a term like *jing* can do justice to Liu Zhi's meaning.[74] Therefore, the above phrase is, perhaps intentionally, ambiguous, as Liu Zhi does not explicitly identify from which scriptural tradition his critics believe him to be deviating.

In the following passage of this introduction Liu Zhi expressed his most explicit acknowledgment of the criticism he faced, as he wrote, "Since the tone of this book does not conform to the tone of Jingtang education, then it is impossible to avoid criticism. But there is no need for criticism!"[75] The term Jingtang

originally referred to the traditional form of mosque-based Islamic education found in the Muslim communities around China. This educational system was, of course, reformed starting in the late sixteenth century by Hu Dengzhou and his colleagues, with the introduction of Islamic literature translated into Chinese, and eventually gave rise to the Han Kitāb scholars and their literary enterprise. Are we to infer from Liu Zhi's statement that he either received or anticipated the criticism of representatives of the very educational system that had produced him?

Such an interpretation is indeed possible, for although some of the strongest criticism would have come from the traditionalists mentioned above, it is nevertheless conceivable that even some in his own ideological camp criticized him for what they deemed an excessive appropriation and assimilation of Chinese terminology and concepts. Jingtang educational reforms had introduced Confucian influence into the Chinese Muslim classroom and curriculum, and this in turn had produced several generations of increasingly "Confucianized" Muslim students and scholars. Liu Zhi was clearly a product of the evolution of Chinese Islamic scholarship that occurred within the framework of this educational system, and his thinking was shaped by its literature. But his particularly innovative use of sources and ideas, drawing mostly from Confucianism but also engaging a wide range of Chinese religio-philosophical teachings, exceeded that of most other Chinese Muslim scholars.

It is noteworthy that in his defense against possible critics, Liu Zhi did not say that his book differs in substance from the curriculum of Jingtang Jiaoyu, but rather in "tone." Liu Zhi intended to affirm his connection to Jingtang education and redress claims to the contrary. He was, after all, a product of this educational system and differed from it not in the content of his scholarship nor in the use of classical Chinese terminology to express the principles of Islam. The difference, as Liu Zhi saw it, was one of "tone," or the degree to which he assimilated Confucian concepts and other Chinese traditions into his thought and writing. Liu Zhi meant to emphasize the commonality of his approach and that of Jingtang education and ease doubts among his fellow Muslims about his commitment to Islamic scholarship, or indeed to Islam itself. He stressed that the criticism against him was simply unfounded and unnecessary.

Some of his own colleagues may have accused him of going too far in his acculturation and syncretism, to which he responded by arguing that those who objected to his views and approach did so out of their own ignorance of higher literary culture. In the subsequent lines of the introduction, Liu Zhi distinguished between levels of learning among potential readers:

> This book is not written for an unlearned audience. For those who are not sufficiently literary, let the teachers of the classics act in

> accordance with the classics and instruct them. They do not need this book. Rather, the ones who need this book are those who thoroughly understand and practice the Three Teachings, but never knew the rites of our Teaching. Reading these writings and grasping their meaning will naturally be of benefit to such readers. When they know of me, and if they blame me, I will let the people of this world decide between us.[76]

In essence, Liu Zhi was saying that not all Muslims were inclined to, or capable of, the type of learning that he and those of his camp propounded. This invitation was extended to sinicized Muslims like himself, whose dual heritage made them especially open to more universal expressions of Islam but who were not knowledgeable about Islamic faith and practice, as well as open-minded non-Muslim Chinese readers who wished to expand their own understanding of universal truths.

As we have seen in the examples above, a number of individuals, both Muslim and non-Muslim and including some relatively important persons, definitely sided with Liu Zhi's views. Some of them even used their prefatory essays to defend him against criticism. For instance, Lu You, echoing Liu Zhi's own rhetorical challenge to the "people of the world," implied that only readers who are themselves worthy will see the real value of Liu Zhi's writings: "How the reader sees, listens, speaks and moves depends on the individual reader. Whatever one sees in the book, whether goodness or wisdom,[77] rests with the individual."[78] We have also seen above how Xu Zhuo defended Liu Zhi's scholarship against potential criticism from among his fellow Confucians ("We and those of our group should not begrudge Master Liu his knowledge and ability").[79]

Liu Zhi also clearly saw the need to deflect such criticism. Even though rhetorically he was confident enough in his views to leave the final judgment of his work to the "people of the world," throughout his text we find further defense of his positions, and even countercriticism of his critics. In particular, he rebuked those whom he addressed as scholars, but whose scholarship, in his opinion, fell short of his own high standards. Thus, decrying the state of classical studies, he wrote, "[W]hen scholars discuss the classics and explain the meaning of their words, they often resort to the use of vulgar terms. They have not avoided incoherence and confusion, and have lost the point of the classics."[80] Liu Zhi cited this failure on the part of other scholars as the main impetus for his own painstaking efforts. Thus he contrasted himself with those whose "vulgarity," "incoherence," and "confusion" might have led them to criticize his work. Interestingly, once again Liu Zhi remains ambiguous by not specifying whether the scholars he is criticizing are Muslims or non-Muslims; he could be addressing

either or both groups. His self-defensive countercriticism, like his presentation of religious teachings and philosophical concepts, reveals itself to be a genuine and simultaneous expression of both Confucian and Islamic perspectives.

THE *TIANFANG DIANLI* IN THE *SIKU QUANSHU*

The most frequently cited evidence of the recognition Liu Zhi and his work received are the presentations of his books to the throne of the Qianlong emperor and the inclusion of the *Tianfang dianli* in the *Siku quanshu* imperial compendium, all of which occurred decades after his death. The *Tianfang dianli* entry in the *Siku quanshu* contains a rare example of an eighteenth-century non-Muslim, Confucian commentary on Liu Zhi's writing found outside of one of his own books. As such, it provides some insight into how the Confucian establishment viewed Liu Zhi and Islam in general.

Actually, to say that the *Tianfang dianli* was included in the *Siku quanshu* is somewhat misleading and fails to convey the complicated history of the great imperial compendium, how it was arranged, and the process by which it was compiled. Answering the 1772 call of the Qianlong emperor, who wished to undertake the greatest literary compendium in Chinese history, scholars across the country submitted whatever extant literature they could obtain. Local and provincial officials gathered the submissions and delivered them to the capital, where a special commission of Confucian scholar-officials was established. This Siku Commission culled the texts, eliminating whatever they regarded as useless or objectionable, and edited the rest for preservation in the compendium. All the texts collected were divided into traditional Chinese literary categories, the so-called "four treasuries" (*siku*): classics (*jingbu*); history (*shibu*); philosophy (*zibu*);[81] and belles lettres (*jibu*).[82]

The Siku Commission was charged with sifting through the submissions and culling only those deemed worthy of preservation, following criteria intended to reflect the ideals of the Qianlong imperium. In reality, the Siku enterprise was not only the greatest compendium project in Chinese history, but also the most extensive censorship initiative. This "darker side" of the Siku enterprise represented for the Qing dynasty an unprecedented opportunity for the systematic proscription and elimination of texts containing ideas deemed harmful or seditious. In all, of the more than ten thousand titles examined by the Siku Commission, as many as twenty-four hundred were destroyed and four to five hundred more were "revised."[83] Consequently, inclusion in the *Siku quanshu* was tantamount to receiving the imprimatur of the throne and the orthodox Confucian establishment.

The Siku Commission was dominated by graduates of the Hanlin Academy, who were exponents of the *kaozheng* ("evidentiary studies") movement. Therefore,

the editors, favoring the literature of their own school, were quite restrictive in their admission of Song-Ming period Neo-Confucian texts into the compendium. They were all the more severe in their treatment of non-Confucian literature. It is therefore understandable in this context that Buddhist and Daoist texts were noticeably underrepresented. When one considers that so many Neo-Confucian and non-Confucian texts were kept out of the imperial compendium, it seems to enhance the status of the *Tianfang dianli* as the lone representative of Chinese Muslim scholarship to have been included.

We must however avoid rushing to the conclusion that Liu Zhi's book gained the unequivocal imprimatur of the Qianlong court. When we examine more closely the process by which texts were approved, as well as the various qualified distinctions under which they were listed, we see that the situation was significantly more complicated than a simple matter of inclusion or exclusion. Based on the commission's evaluations of a text, it could have one of a number of different fates. Of the many thousands of texts examined by the scholars, those that were deemed completely unacceptable politically or ideologically were not only excluded, but actually expunged. For those submissions that were not destroyed, there were yet other determinations to be made.

Before coming to the specific listing of Liu Zhi's book in the catalogue, it is first necessary to explain briefly the way the editors arranged the final product of the *Siku quanshu.* The main compendium, totaling 3,697 titles, consisted of "books selected by the *Ssu-k'u* Commission for inclusion in the imperial library."[84] Apart from this, there was also an annotated catalogue of all the titles and authors of approved works, "4,490 pages long in its modern reprint," called the *Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao* (General Annotated Catalogue of the *Siku quanshu*). The *Tianfang dianli* was included in this latter section.

The emperor's chief councillor, Yu Minzhong (1714–1780), emphasized two criteria for books to be preserved in their full form in the imperial library, requiring that they be either "of real benefit to human understanding" or else "very seldom seen."[85] The "guiding principles" (*fanli*) for the annotated catalogue, on the other hand, emphasize the utility of texts, saying that the "learning of the sages emphasized clarifying the essence in order to achieve usefulness. All writings in which realities cannot be seen clearly are wasted words."[86] Within this framework Yu Minzhong added that "books which contained little that was praiseworthy and much that was contemptible would be listed by title only in the Annotated Catalog."[87] Judging conformity to these criteria and guidelines, and the corresponding fate of any given text, was a highly subjective and politicized process.

Given this context, we may now attempt to assess the relative place of the *Tianfang dianli* in the greater Siku project. Liu Zhi's book was listed among the

"extant titles" (*cunmu*) in the "miscellaneous schools" subsection in the "philosophy" section of the annotated catalogue. We can safely say that this was not the most prestigious placement possible. The book would certainly not have been deemed important enough for reprint in the *Collectanea,* nor was its manuscript preserved in the imperial library as part of the *Siku quanshu* collection. It was listed by title and author in the annotated catalogue, together with works that, according to Yu Minzhong's criteria, "contained little that was praiseworthy and much that was contemptible."

This designation notwithstanding, the *Tianfang dianli*'s status was not utterly negative. Reading Yu Minzhong's criteria in the best possible light, for a text to have been mentioned in the catalogue meant that it contained at least a "little that was praiseworthy." In this way, it was obviously better for a text to be acknowledged by the Siku Commission, even by a mere listing in the annotated catalogue, than to be omitted or, worse, expunged. The fact that Liu Zhi and his book were listed under the general heading of "philosophy," rather than being "exiled" to the "belles lettres" section, was also a victory of sorts. The "philosophy" category was made up of some secondary Confucian writings; works on astronomy and mathematics; works on magic and divination; arts; medicine; and various texts representing the "hundred schools" of non-Confucian thought, including militarists, legalists, Buddhism, Daoism, and a broad heading called "miscellaneous schools" (*zajia*). Even though Liu Zhi's text incorporates a significant amount of Confucian thought, it was principally concerned with a non-Confucian teaching, and therefore did not merit inclusion in the "classics" section. And while it also deals with topics, such as geography, that are within the purview of the "history" section, it did not really belong there either. All things considered, the assignment to the "philosophy" section was most appropriate and probably the best fate the book could have achieved.

The entry for the *Tianfang dianli* in the annotated catalogue only reinforces the ambivalence of the *Siku quanshu* scholars. The writer of the entry provided an objective biography highlighting Liu Zhi's background and major scholarly achievements. He also accurately summarized the contents of the book. At the end of the entry, however, he added his editorial comments:

> Everything is explained in detail, with great respect for his own religion's teaching. Islam is fundamentally far-fetched and absurd. However, (Liu) Zhi has extensively studied Confucian texts, so he intermingled various ideas from the classics in order to embellish his discourse. His literary style is actually rather elegant. However, the premise is at its root untrue and so the clever literary ornamentation does him no good.[88]

This tepid review echoes the positive statements made by the Confucian scholars who wrote prefaces to Liu Zhi's works a couple of generations earlier in their acknowledgment of his meticulous and systematic approach to scholarship, his erudition, and his eloquence. However, the bias against Islam as a foreign, fundamentally non-Confucian, and therefore unorthodox tradition is impossible to overlook. It would seem that nothing Liu Zhi could have done as a Chinese Muslim scholar, short of renouncing his religion, would have changed this impression, which was probably quite common among the Confucian literati at the time.[89]

In the final analysis, of the manner in which Liu Zhi and the *Tianfang dianli* were treated by the *Siku quanshu* scholars, it may be said that their reaction to both the author and his work was predictably lukewarm. The book, after all, was but one of many thousands to have been submitted and considered for the compendium. Although it has been considered a great distinction within Chinese Muslim scholarly circles for Liu Zhi's name and the title of the book to have earned this "honorable mention" from the imperial commission, the work was hardly remarkable from the perspective of the *Siku quanshu* editors. It was listed in the annotated catalogue because, according to criteria cited above, it qualified as an "extant work of the hundred schools," which may have possessed some "practical value." The editorial review, however, speaks of Liu Zhi's work in terms reminiscent of the description "flashy or meaningless style rather than solid scholarship," qualities that would normally have eliminated a book from inclusion altogether. Moreover, if the Islamic content of the book had been regarded as heretical by orthodox Confucian standards, the *Tianfang dianli* could have found itself ablaze atop a book-burning pyre.

It would appear, however, that the respect Liu Zhi paid to the Confucian tradition, together with his obvious erudition and his elegant prose, helped guarantee the book's preservation and the modicum of recognition it did receive. It is also possible, albeit purely conjectural, that in light of the Muslim violence plaguing the government at the time in western China, the Siku Commission may have wanted to appease the well-behaved, assimilated Muslims of eastern China by acknowledging one of their own. The literary merits and relative orthodoxy of Liu Zhi's *Tianfang dianli* may have earned it a place as the lone token representative of the Han Kitāb in the *Siku quanshu.* The inclusion of Liu Zhi and his *Tianfang dianli* may not have been considered significant at all to the late eighteenth-century official arbiters of orthodoxy and literary value. Yet despite the subordinate placement and ambivalent review of the text, the fact that it appeared at all was of immense importance to the Chinese Muslim community, for whom Liu Zhi's posthumous achievement was, and continues to be, a great source of pride.

The recognition Liu Zhi received from the Siku Commission certainly sealed

the perception of the author as the pre-eminent Chinese Muslim scholar, both within and outside his own community. It also solidified the status of the *Tianfang dianli* as the most famous, if not the most important, of the Han Kitāb books. Yet these distinctions notwithstanding, we may presume that had Liu Zhi lived to read the *Siku quanshu* editor's assessment of his work, he would have been disappointed by its suggestion that his writing offered style but little substance. Ultimately, the text failed to persuade this influential reader of the value of Islam. Liu Zhi and his scholarship ran squarely into the fatal impasse that any non-Confucian religio-philosophical teaching was bound to encounter. He would have been bitterly disappointed to find that the only aspect of his work appreciated by Confucian readers was his ornamental writing style. He would have found the faint praise he received in the *Siku quanshu* hollow and misplaced, a Pyrrhic victory at best. He probably would have felt that he had not achieved his supreme mission of communicating the truth of Islamic teachings and elevating them to an equal status alongside Confucianism. In the end, the *Siku quanshu* entry was the virtual antithesis of the sentiment Liu Zhi expressed in an essay attached to his final book:

> I respectfully hope that the gentlemen of this world will remember my humble self not as one whose perceptions were extensive, nor whose expressions ingenious, but whose single ambition was to propound and elucidate orthodox learning, correct any errors in it, and fill whatever was lacking or omitted from it. If my embellishments generally lack grace, it is so that I could achieve a grand vision. And if I am able to bequeath my lesson to eternity, then this is the good fortune of the Way.[90]